





उत्तर प्रदेश
राजर्षि टण्डन मुक्त विश्वविद्यालय

CWED -01

**Foundation Course in
Women's Empowerment
and Development**

Block

1

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

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LET US BEGIN HERE

This is the Foundation Course of the certificate programme in Women's Empowerment and Development Programme. It is divided into four Blocks. Each of these Blocks represents a specific theme, which is discussed in three to five Units. The Units are logically arranged into a sequence to cover the main aspects of each theme. Besides Units, each Block contains a Block Introduction in the beginning and a list of references at the end. **Block 1** contains, in addition, a Course Introduction. You are advised to carefully read the Course Introduction in order to know about the rationale, focus and content of the course you have been offered to read. Similarly, you should also read the **Block Introduction**, in order to follow the logic and content of a Block.

You have now in your hands the first Block of this Course. It comprises four Units in all. Before proceeding to read the Units, you are advised to go through these instructions about how to read the course-material. Here we first give the design of a Unit and then explain the system of numbering of sections in a Unit. Then we tell you what is contained in various sections of unit, and how you should go about completing different tasks involved while reading the course-material.

DESIGN OF A UNIT

A systematic representation of the design of Units is given below:

Unit X*

X.0 Aims and Purpose

X.1 Introduction

X.2 Section (Theme of Section)

X.2.1 Sub-section 1 of X.2

X.2.2 Sub-section 2 of X.2

Think it Over 1

Learn From Your Experience 1

X.3 Section (Theme of Section)

X.3.1 Sub-section 1 of X.3

X.3.2 Sub-section 2 of X.3

Think it Over 2

Learn From Your Experience 2

*X stands for unit number

The numbering and length of the above section and their sub-sections may vary according to the volume and depth of course material in each unit. The last three sections in each unit with the following titles are also numbered.

- Summing Up
- Clarification of the Terms Used
- Some Useful Readings

Numbering of Sections in a Unit

The number of sections in each Unit may vary and the numbering of sections will conform to the number of sections in the Unit. The last three sections are numbered in the serial order following the number of earlier sections.

As the scheme suggests, we have divided the Units into sections and sub-sections for easy reading and better comprehension. Each section is indicated distinctly by **BOLD CAPITALS** and each sub-section by a **relatively smaller but bold typeface**. The significant divisions within sub-sections are in **still smaller bold typeface** so as to make it easier for you to see their place within the sub-sections and the items which need to be highlighted are numbered (i), (ii), etc. For purpose of uniformity we have employed the same scheme in every Unit throughout the Course. Let us now discuss each section of a unit.

Aims and Purpose

We begin each Unit with the section **Aims and Purpose**. It articulates briefly what we expect from you once you complete working on the Unit.

Introduction

In the section **Introduction** we clearly specify

- a) the relationship of the present unit to the earlier Units of a block
- b) the theme of the Unit, and
- c) the order of presentation of all the sections from Introduction to Let Us Sum Up.

Concluding Remarks

The section of each Unit under the heading **Summing Up** summarises the whole Unit for the purpose of recapitulation and ready reference.

Do You Know?

Since a course may deal with abstract ideas and other related concepts, it is sometimes necessary to explain some ideas in a separate enclosure (called **Do You Know** in our units). This is side-information, necessary to fully comprehend the main text. These enclosures include (i) explanatory note regarding concepts, (ii) biographical details about particular thinkers, (iii) information of relevant event(s), person etc. (iv) historical background of socio-political events etc.

Illustration

There are several illustrations in each Block in the form of graphs, tables, pictures, diagrams, and charts. The main purpose of these illustrations is not only to make the study comprehensive and interesting, but also to provoke you to rethink and articulate questions about various formations.

Think it Over

We have given self-check exercises under the caption **Think it Over** at the end of the main sections or long sub-sections in the Unit. To answer the questions you should

- a) write your answers using a separate sheet
- b) compare your answers with the given text.

You should read each Unit and note the important points in the margin. This will help you in your study. It will also help you to answer the assignment questions.

Learn From Your Experience

Besides Think it Over exercise we have another exercise for you in the form of Learn From Your Experience activities. Here you should carefully read the course material and apply the information contained therein while carrying out this exercise. These exercises are meant to develop your ability to relate your knowledge to day-to-day life experiences. You should complete this exercise on a separate sheet and then discuss your answers with other students at the Study Centre. The questions in Assignments and the Term-end Examination may sometimes be linked to this part of your course-material. Therefore, make sure that you complete all these exercises in each Unit.

Clarification of the Terms Used

Each unit has Clarification of the Terms Used at the end to explain the basic ideas, technical terms and difficult words.

Some Useful Readings

We have referred to a few books or articles under the caption Some Useful Readings. You may consult these books if they are available in your Study Centre or in any other library near your home. This is not a compulsory reading. But it will certainly help to increase your level of understanding of the particular themes in each Unit.

References

Besides Further Reading we have given a List of References at the end of each Block. This is a comprehensive list of the books and articles used by the course writers to prepare the Units. This shows you that your course material is based on a wide spectrum of literature available on particular themes, related to your course. This should give you confidence of being aware of a wide body of information available in the subject of your choice. The main purpose of this list is to inform you about the range of literature available in this area of study. If interested in widening your knowledge you may try to look for these references. To help you in locating them, each reference covers the name of the author, year of publication, title of the book/article, place of publications and name of the publisher.

Audio and Video Aids

Some of the themes have been selected for the audio and video programmers to supplement the printed material. These will help you to understand the course with greater clarity. You are encouraged to contact the Coordinator of the Study Centre assigned to you to get the benefit of the audio and video aids. Your suggestions regarding new types and formats for making more programmes are most welcome by the course development team of this programme.

Assignments

You will receive a set of two assignments for the whole course. Both of these are Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) and should be sent after completion to the Study Centre assigned to you for evaluation. Make sure to complete all your assignments because the grades you get in each of these assignments are included in the final evaluation for your degree. While working through the assignment you must:

- Clearly write your enrolment number
- Answer them in your handwriting and in your own words
- Write clearly and neatly so that it is easy to read your answers
- Have enough margins on one side of your answer-sheets so that the-evaluator may write his/her comments on your performance.

Before answering the assignments

- Read all the Units in the block and additional reading material (if available).
- The answers to the assignments must reach the Study Centre by the last date indicated.

Term-end Examination

Your understanding of the print-material provided in the four Blocks FEW-01 and in the audio-video programmes, relating to particular Units and Blocks in this Course will culminate in your taking the Term-end Examination. The question paper for this examination will have three sections. Section A will contain questions, requiring descriptive answers while Section B will have questions, requiring explanatory and analytical approach in your answers. Last section, i.e. Section C, contains short and objective type of questions, requiring exact and specific answer in terms of yes/no or true/false. Try to prepare for the term-end examination in terms of these three main categories of questions.

Preparation of Course Material

The syllabus of this course is designed by an Expert Committee (see p.2. of this block) and prepared by the Course Preparation Team, which comprises a Course Editor, Course or Block Coordinator and authors of the various units. The Expert Committee has selected the themes and sub-themes of the Blocks and Units of this course while authors of the units have provided their expertise in elaborating them in the form of the main text of each unit. The course editor and the block editors have carefully examined the course contents and given their suggestions and comments for improving the clarity, readability and comprehensibility of the material in the units. The Course or Block Coordinator, who is always one of the IGNOU faculty members, has the sole responsibility of editing and transforming the Units in IGNOU style after receiving the course material from authors. The Coordinator sends the revised drafts of the Block to the Course Editor and the language editor then incorporates their suggestions and comments. The Block Coordinator is also responsible for getting the artwork done and for preparing the final manuscript for printing. Later, going through page proofs and getting the Hindi translation of the Block is also carried out by the Block Coordinator. Finally, along with the coordination of the production of audio-video programmes, related with the Block, preparing the manuscript of the Block in its Hindi version is to be carried out by the coordinator who has to set the Hindi translation and later check the proofs as well. The course coordinator, who has an overall idea of the course structure, checks the units for a possible repetition of or contradiction in the material. Thus, through this long process of checks and re-checks, the IGNOU faculty prepares the self-instructional material (SIMs), which reaches you. All the same, the IGNOU faculty wishes to request you through this column for sending your comments and suggestions on specific points in this material so that further prints of this course may carry improvements, suggested by you.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

The aim of this course is to provide an analytical perspective on women-related issues that will help in formulating new questions and finding avenues for change. It attempts to show that the gender roles we receive through our socialisation are neither natural nor fixed. They are socially constructed, culturally and historically viable. They can be changed and are being actively challenged both in the academic field and in social life.

Gender roles are determined through the interaction of a number of factors. Some of these are material factors: the division of labour, constraints imposed through family socialization, caste, marriage and kinship structures, inequality in inheritance and in access to resources for maintaining health, life and livelihood, hierarchies that obtain inside the family and outside in the realm of wage work on the basis of gender, class and caste. Some are ideological factors: domestic ideologies, religious beliefs, rituals and customs that reinforce inequality, and of course the internalization of hierarchies by women themselves. Most of the material and ideological factors are embedded in institutions which play a crucial role in sustaining and reproducing women's subordination: family, caste, religion, media, labour market, and the state.

That this need not be so is evident from the fact that different types of social organization have existed, especially in the past, in India and in other countries—matrilocal, matrilineal, tribal—where women have not been constrained in the same way. Of course even in these the amount of power available to women still has to be seen within the wider constraints of each system.

The course introduces a variety of past and continuing struggles for gender inequality both in India and in other South Asian countries. Women do not belong to a single class. Their subordination takes different shapes and there are many other differences in terms of locality and region, urban and rural. Consequently their struggles too have been marked by both common principles and by a diversity of issues, strategies and forms of mobilization. Though South Asia is divided into several nation-states, many of the problems women face are similar especially in terms of patriarchal oppression, economic deprivation and religious fundamentalism. In post-independence India, there have been struggles at every level: by grass roots, peasant and working class movements, by women in autonomous organisations and in political parties. They have taken up many issues including ownership and distribution of land, ecological and environment degradation, rape and other forms of violence against women. They have also campaigned against liquor, forced displacement and the economic effects of globalisation. There are other actors in this field too, notably non-governmental organisations, the state, and international agencies since gender has become a global issue. The course encourages a critical look at these initiatives, including those of the state, and stresses the necessity for a wider perspective since it views the oppression of women to be related to other forms of inequality and not as something that exists in and by itself.

Similarly the received interpretation of pre-independence Indian social reform movements are also questioned and alternative ways of evaluating our history are suggested. Not only is women's participation in the national movement discussed but the course seeks to enlarge the meaning of the term political in the present context. There are various levels and forms of participation both inside and outside established institutions, and each carries its own set of possibilities and constraints. There is an artificiality in the so-called division of public and private and this has had many kinds of effects, one of which is the restricted definition of the political. The course therefore takes up conventional questions of political representation and reservations for women as well as other forms of politicization and mobilization.

In some areas, a number of changes have taken place, in others too few, while in the past five decades new types of oppression have also appeared. In this context, special attention has been given to contemporary issues such as recognition of women's unpaid work, employment of rural and urban women in organised and unorganised sectors, the formation of collectives or cooperatives, questions of education, health, legal change, the problematic aspect of several laws, and of course the linkages between all these areas.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

There are four units in this block. These four units deal with four different aspects of gender construction: the conceptual, ideological, institutional bases of gender construction and women's status in India as emerged through the process of gender construction. This block aims to highlight the 'interlinkages among various social, cultural, political and economic processes that help generate and perpetuate gender construction in society by providing women a socially segregated, economically dependent and exploited, culturally passive and meek, and politically a powerless position. It also aims to dispel the myth of backward self image of women and bring forth the various efforts made by women at various levels to resist the various structural subordination imposed on them. Unit 1 deals with the various conceptual issues of *Social Construction of Gender*. It distinguishes between the biological phenomena of sex and the cultural construction of gender. It goes on examining briefly the process of gender construction through the various economic and social arrangements viz. institutions of sexual division of labour, kinship and caste. As these institutions are culture specific, there are variations in the nature of gender construction in human society. This unit has discussed these variations and also has critically examined the universalist position on gender construction.

Unit 2 is on the *Institutional Basis of Gender Construction*. This unit deals with the roles of various social, economic and political institutions in gender construction. It examines the significance of the institutions of family, caste, religion, media, labour market and the state in organising social lives of the members of the society in general and their specific contributions towards inculcation and sustenance of gender construction in Indian society.

Unit 3 focuses on *Socialisation and Ideologies of Gender Construction*. This unit clarifies the concepts of socialisation and ideology at the outset and examines their role in gender construction at different stages of life of members of society-viz., childhood, adulthood and motherhood. In recent years there have been certain changes in the institutions of marriage, division of labour caused by education and various emerging avenues of employment for women. There have been corresponding changes in the process of socialisation and in the ideologies of these institutions. We have examined the implications of these changes for women in Indian society. We have also discussed the paradoxical condition of women in contemporary Indian society emerged out of prevailing perceptions and contradictions. The last section of this unit recasts some of the forgotten ideological formulations of the institutions of family and religion.

Unit 4 deals with the status of *Women in Contemporary India*. It begins with the problematics of generalisation of women's issues in India and analyses the forms and the extents of women's marginalisation in Indian society. It discusses in details the low economic, education, health and political status of women in Indian society; and the various social, economic, cultural and political factors for their low status. The last section of this unit discusses the human development and gender empowerment issues in India in a comparative frame. Now let us begin with the issue of gender construction first, since it is going to stay with us for the whole course.

UNIT 1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

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1.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This is the first unit not only of this course, but also of the whole programme on Women's Empowerment and Development. As the title of this unit shows, our aim is to acquaint you with the meaning, various dimensions and implications of gender construction for women citing examples from India and the neighbouring countries. The process of gender construction is closely associated with the culture and the institutional arrangements of the society through which it operates. Significantly gender construction operates both locally and universally. This unit will expose you to these composite phenomena. After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the processes of gender construction and its relation to the culture of the society,
- Examine the implications of gender construction for the division of labour,
- Examine the relationship between gender and the institutional arrangements of the society viz., kinship, caste, marriage, and
- Analyse the important features and limitations of the universalist position on gender construction.

We expect that after reading this unit you will be able not only to understand the complexities of the processes of gender construction but also to raise questions as to why these are being practiced? What are the sources of legitimacy of these practices? And so on.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins with a brief discussion of the meaning of social construction. It also simultaneously

discusses the meaning of gender construction and its relation to culture. As the process of gender construction is perpetuated through various social institutions, we discuss gender specifically in relation to the division of labour and the institutions of kinship, caste and marriage as it is available in every culture. In the section on sexual division of labour we discuss its crucial implications for women viz, hierarchization of tasks, unequal distribution of resources, devaluation and invisibility of women's work and ultimately disempowerment of women.

In the section on kinship and gender we have shown that variations in the patterns of kinship effect the process of gender construction in the society. Besides discussing the variations in gender constructions, we have also discussed the gender issue in primitive societies, and also in a few contemporary societies of South and South-East Asia. In the section on gender construction and caste besides making a brief historical survey we have also tried to understand gender construction through power relations, rituals, marriage practices, regulation of sexuality etc. in the caste system. In the last section of this unit we examined the universalist position of gender construction and its critique.

1.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND GENDER

It is very often said that there is no such thing as a social reality and what are "social constructions". Similarly in reality there is nothing intrinsically "good" or "bad", these are but social constructions. In other words, morality is the acquired vision of a society. How is the vision of a society or its social construction shaped? Is it shaped automatically? Is it culture specific? Let us examine this process of social construction.

1.2.1 Social Construction : What is it?

Everyday we observe various objects, experience a lot of happening, go through several interactions. Some of these phenomena are new, some are old and some of these are continuous with the past. As regards all these individual phenomenon, we develop or construct an image. We develop our own understanding of the world around us and see these phenomena accordingly. Indeed we filter every thing that happens to us everyday through the lens or screen of our understanding of our world. "This everyday 'sense of things' forms the foundation of the social construction of reality (Gray, E.D. 1982 : 39).

But where does this understanding come from? Social construction is a continuous process in which both individual and wider social processes play a part. Each and every construction is influenced by the individual understanding of the social actor and it has obviously a subjective bias. Social construction is also shaped by the interests of particular groups and classes. In this sense too it is biased. More often than not cultural values, norms, customs, languages, ideologies and institutional frameworks of society are used to justify particular social constructions with a view to projecting the subjective bias of groups and classes as rational and to make it broad-based and legitimate. Hence social constructions through which we understand our everyday experience, make moral judgements, and classify other people according to religion, sex, caste etc, are culturally determined and can be changed. They shape social norms, values, customs, beliefs etc. and are also inculcated through them. The social processes like socialisation and education also help to make a particular kind of social construction enduring and widely accepted. Gender is a product of such social construction. It is also shaped within the given cultural apparatus of a society. Let us examine how gender construction is shaped in our society. To understand this process we are to begin with a distinction between sex and gender.

1.2.2 Gender and Sex : The Differences

Very often we use these terms interchangeably. Do they bear the same meaning? Is there any difference between the two? Yes, these are different.

Gender refers to the socially constructed and culturally determined roles that women and men play in their daily lives. Gender is a conceptual tool for analysis and it has been used to highlight various structural relationships of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets and in political structures, as well as in the household. 'Sex' on the other hand, refers to the biological differences between male and female, which are much the same across space and over time. Gender, the socially constructed differences and relations between males and females, varies greatly from place to place and from time to time. Gender can therefore be defined as a notion that offers a set of frameworks within which the social and ideological construction and representation of differences between the sexes are explained (Masfield, A. 1994).

1.2.3 Culture and Gender Construction

As indicated earlier gender construction is culturally determined. At this point you may be interested to know what is culture. Culture is an important concept that can be defined as "description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour (Williams, R. 1987 : 43). This definition of culture would cover the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions and ideologies which express or govern social relationships. It also affects the patterns of communication among the members of the society (obviously men and women). Gender or the cultural construction of the masculine and feminine, plays a crucial role in shaping institutions and practices in every society. It is important in order to understand the system of stratification and domination in terms of caste, class, race and especially the relations of power between men and women within a culture. At this point we should examine the following important elements of gender construction and their relations to culture.

a) Gender Construction Supports the Systems of Domination

The construction of gender is an integral part of the project of creating and maintaining systems of dominance. It determines the range of choices/options open to men and women. These choices are linked to work and the production process, to mobility/seclusion, dress and behaviour and so on. In other words, the cultural, social and political practices of a society, namely, the sexual division of labour, role allocation and stereotyping, property and inheritance, distribution of authority and governance, and most importantly the unequal concentration of power and status among men and women in the society depicts the patterns of its gender construction.

The point to note here is that gendered categories are never neutral or abstract, and they are not equal. While there is an argument in favour of complementarity of gender specific roles in some societies, this argument does not hold true on closer examination. Most often, hierarchies between men and women obtain in terms of access to resources, control over choices, and the social evaluation of roles.



Have their social roles been properly recognised and evaluated?

Courtesy: Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Do You Know? - I

Gender

Gender is a concept that refers to learned, culturally determined (as opposed to biologically determined) differences in the behaviour patterns of women and men in relation to each other and to their social context. Activities, rights and obligations are considered feminine or masculine by a given society or social group; members of that society learn to play gender roles in accord with these expectations. The norms and values that create gender roles are present both in society as a whole and in the household. Gender roles greatly influence the position of women and their prospects in life.

Gender roles affect the division of labour; they also affect access to and control over the allocation of resources, benefits, and decision making. This contributes to an inter-dependence between women and men, which is complex, subtle, flexible and involves power relations. It also has implications for women's income-generating opportunities. Women often have less access to resources than men, and less control over their own labour. Access to certain sub-sectors and sources of employment may be restricted, and support services may be harder to obtain. Finally, they may have difficulty in exercising control over their income.

Gender-specific characteristics are thus important variables to consider in planning and policy making. The impact of gender, however, is modified by other socio-economic variables, such as socio-economic status of the household, ethnicity and age. Gender roles vary within a society and over time; 'women' again, are not a homogenous group. Acknowledgement of this heterogeneity by planners is crucial. Women differ with respect to work, interests, and needs.

[Thea Hilhorst, 1992]

b) Gender Construction; viz-a-vis Individual Expression of Gender

Feminist psycho-analysts assess that gender cannot be seen as entirely culturally, linguistically or politically constructed. In addition to cultural apparatuses, there are individual psychological processes that construct each person's sense of his or her gender identity or gendered subjectivity (Chodorow, N. 1995 : 516). We need to make the distinction at this point between the following :

- i) *prescriptive constructions of gender* which are socially, politically, culturally and historically determined for example, a girl is socialised to be a housewife and to perform her role according to societal norms.
- ii) *individual inflections or subversions of these constructions* which are made by the interaction of an individual psyche with socio-political or cultural or historical norms, for example a boy undergoes sex transformation. What we need also to take account of is how particular societies respond to variations in individual interpretations or expressions of gender. Do the societies institutionalise such practices or do they institutionalise greater control over individual expression of gender?

Categories of masculine and feminine do not remain static through history in any society. What are the specific ways in which constructions of gender shift from one historical period to another? What are the forces that effect these shifts and how do different forces of dominance, different hegemonic interests join in the shaping of gender ideologies in any particular era? And what does this shaping and re-shaping of gender mean for women—their work, their lives, their sexuality and their status?

This unit will review some of these questions while examining the institutions of division of labour, kinship and caste.

Think it Over 1

Read the previous section of this lesson very carefully and try to distinguish between sex and gender in your way. If possible, relate these differences to your own experience.

1.3 GENDER AND WORK: THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

The sexual division of labour is an essential component of the social construction of gender. The sexual division of labour, typically assigns separate productive tasks to each sex. In some societies there is a greater recognition of equivalence between men and women in the productive tasks. Equivalence means that each producer, male or female, has complete control over the products of his or her labour. What must be emphasized here is the importance of looking at the sexual division of labour in terms of how the products of that labour are allocated and controlled, not solely in terms of the criteria by which certain tasks are made sex specific (Edholm, Harris and Young 1977:122). The argument of separate but equal spheres, for example bread winners for men and home making for women, has been used to justify gender differentiation in the allocation of work. It indicates that each and every socially assigned task would be given equal weightage and recognition. This argument claims that there is nothing wrong with the sexual division of labour on the lines of production and reproduction, that is, child-bearing. However, problem arises when some of these

tasks are glorified and some are derecognised. Some of the crucial issues to be looked into here are as follows:

a) **Reproductive Responsibilities and Hierarchisation of Task**

The crucial issues that need to be investigated in the sexual division of labour are, first, whether women's functions revolve primarily around the needs of reproduction, mothering, childcare, socialisation and second, how rigid this differentiation is, and third, whether women without responsibilities of childcare are also required to perform the same functions. A related question is why this separation of spheres has been tied to a devaluation of women's tasks in many societies. Obviously an important part of the sexual division of labour is the sex-based hierarchisation of tasks whereby gender specific tasks performed by women are given a lower status, and tasks performed by men are given a higher status.

b) **Unequal Distribution of Resources**

In examining the sexual division of labour, we need to look at the relations of distribution. Given the existence of separate spheres, can one assume an equal distribution of the product of the household? We cannot. The unequal distribution of resources within the household has been well documented. Women routinely get less than men. This is also the point at which the separation of spheres into public and private acquires a new significance. Women share a large part of the productive activity of the household but since the household is seen as a 'private' sphere, their productive work is not recognised.

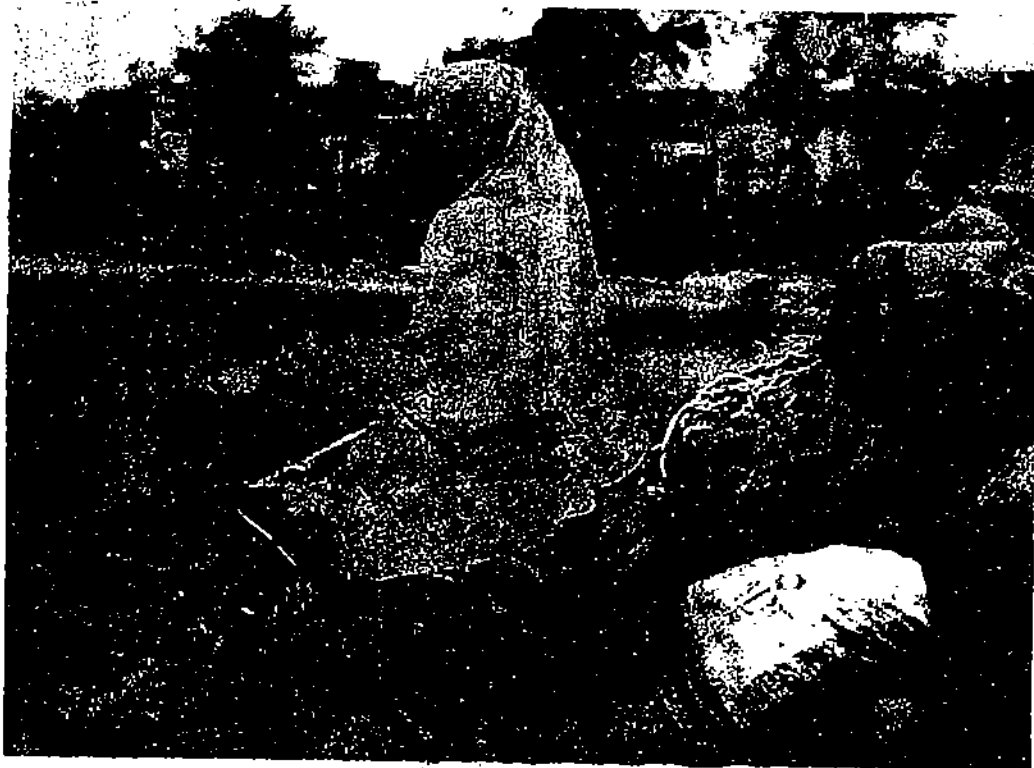
c) **Devaluation and Invisibility : An Ideological Bias**

Barrett (1988) has examined the relationship between the ideological construction of masculinity-femininity and the sexual division of labour in capitalist society. She shows the linkage between the sexual division of labour in which women are concentrated in lowest rungs of work (for instance as wage labourers concentrated in the lowest paid jobs which are then feminized, like secretaries, clerical jobs, personal services, catering, beauty care, hairdressing, babysitting etc.) and the family ideology within capitalism which puts the entire responsibility for domestic work and child care on women, a responsibility that is not only unpaid but also devalued. This responsibility for childcare and domestic work makes it impossible for women to take up full time regular employment. The female work force is thus inevitably concentrated in the informal or unorganised sector, that is, working sometimes from the home and sometimes part time in unskilled jobs that are totally outside the purview of any protective legislation, where minimum wages and worker social security benefits, etc. are non-existent. These jobs then get identified as "feminine work" because only women perform them. In the entire movement for better wages therefore, the slogan "equal pay for equal work" does not express the full situation of women, because the paid work that they perform is not, by definition, equated with the work men do, and also because the work in the household that they do is given no monetary value.

d) **Non-Comparability of Men's and Women's Work**

The ideological implications of the sexual division of labour is evident in the way the so-called non-comparability of men's and women's work is used to assign unequal portions of the product of labour to each sex. Very often there is an invisibility of this inequality within the family system. The end result is the invisibility primarily of women's labour. Edholm, Harris and Young (1977) argue that the relations between men and women are crucial in determining many social structures and practices and, in order to 'see women', we should analyse practices and structures to reveal the significance of women's absence from public

roles. These are often the underlying context for statements on economic power, male and female roles etc. Women do not naturally disappear, their disappearance is socially created and constantly reaffirmed. Keeping women out of public roles, is in fact an active and time consuming aspect of social organisation (1977 : 126).



Why hide the face? Socially undefined role?

Courtesy : Atul Yadav, New Delhi

e) **Disempowerment of Women through Sexual Division of Labour**

The sexual division of labour as a social process also leads to an internalization of gender constructions on the part of women, i.e., women's perception of themselves and what is more, women's position in production and distribution and their exclusion from public social participation. It is this systematic devaluation of women's labour and their worth in society through its institutional and ideological apparatus that the system of patriarchy is strengthened. Patriarchy means the systemic oppression of women in the material sphere (of labour, work, allocation, remuneration and reproduction) and in the ideological sphere (of the representation of each of these activities). All these contributes to the process of disempowerment of women in society.

Think it Over 2

What do you understand by division of labour? What are the impacts of sexual division of labour on women?

1.4 GENDER AND KINSHIP

Kinship plays a crucial role in the socio-cultural fabric of the society. This institution shapes widely

the patterns of women's work participation, educational attainment, physical mobility and productive and reproductive roles. However, difference in the kinship structure also effects the process of gender construction.

1.4.1 Gender in Tribal Societies

Human societies have undergone a process of transformation from primitive to modern culture. The tribal societies exhibit the traits of primitive culture. Let us examine how gender is constructed in the tribal societies. As gender construction is culture specific there has been far more variation in the sexual division of roles and in gender construction than is commonly recognized.

a) New Guinea

Margaret Mead (1935) was one of the first anthropologists to focus her research on women, specifically on the socio-cultural construction of gender and cultural variability in sex roles. In "**Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies**" Mead provided an account of three primitive societies and grouped their social attitudes towards temperament about the very obvious facts of sex difference. "Mead's work established that culture played a crucial role in conditioning male and female roles and personalities in the society.

In a relatively small area of New Guinea, she investigated three tribes. Among the Arapesh, the personalities of both sexes are, according to our notions, "Feminine" (like being docile, timid, gentle, emotional etc.) Here male and female are approximately equal. Among the Mundugumor, in contrast, both sexes have personalities stereotyped or gender typed as "masculine" (like being assertive, aggressive, bold, brave, instrumental, objective etc.) Among the Tehambuli, (the third tribe), the ordinary male shows "feminine" personality traits and the common female shows "masculine" personality traits. Mead concludes that social conditioning and not biology, accounts for these differences.

b) Aboriginal Tribe in Australia

Another early anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry (1939) worked among the Kimberley, an aboriginal tribe in Australia. Kaberry points out that aboriginal women are almost completely autonomous. In their regular life husbands and wives are teaching each other, working together and taking collective decisions on when to work and when not to. Although men and women had clearly specified work that was differentiated, there was egalitarian reciprocity between women and their husbands in these societies. She asserts that it is aboriginal women's indispensable economic role and its associated power that underlies their "privileges", "good treatment" and "justice" in the household.

c) Zuni Tribe in North America

Writing in 1934, Ruth Benedict, in her **Patterns of Culture**, outlines the institution of Berdache, which for us is very illustrative of gender as a category. "In most of North America there exists the institution of Berdaches. These men-women (men in biological endowment, but women in social roles) were men who at puberty or thereafter took the dress and the occupations of women. Sometimes, they married other men and lived with them. Sometimes they were persons of weak sexual endowment who chose this role to avoid the jeers of women. The Berdaches were leaders in women's occupations, good healers in certain diseases. They were usually, in spite of the manner in which they were accepted, regarded with a certain embarrassment. But they had a social place. The emphasis in most tribes was upon the fact that men who took over women's occupations excelled by reason of their strength and initiative.

There are obviously several reasons why a person becomes a Berdache in Zuni, but whatever the reason, men who have chosen openly to assume women's dress have the same chance as any other person to establish themselves as functioning members of society. Their response is socially recognized. If they have native ability, they can give it scope; if they are weak creatures, they fail in terms of their weakness of character, not in terms of their reversal of the normal order (Benedict, 1934: 243-244).

d) Societies in North America

There are some societies where roles are gender differentiated and specified. However, in these societies boundaries of these roles are not sacrosanct, with both men and women crossing over to do work that is traditionally within the domain of the other. North American Indian Societies are a classic example. Noted Anthropologist Whitehead argues that in North American Indian societies, there is a widespread autonomy accorded to individual persons. This extends to the domain of "gender variance where individuals decide the social, cultural and ritual roles they would like to play. It also involves decisions regarding gender transformations. In some societies like the Navajo, women and men who changed their gender were put into a third gender category". In other tribes male and female had different statuses for gender transformation whether they wanted to be homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual; and whether they wanted to cross gender for all the time or only part of the time. While this was also largely based on individual will, sometimes when men did not have sons, they would raise daughters as sons. This would mean that there are societies in which an understanding of gender roles does not have any necessary link with biological sex (Albers, 1989 : 136).

While occupational roles and productive labour were salient markers of gender differentiation in the populations of the Great Basin of North America, for instance, many of the tasks customarily performed by men and women were readily interchangeable as situations demanded. Men and women could even acquire proficiency in opposite sex tasks without getting stigmatized, being subjected to negative stereotypes or losing their gender identity. Not only could men gain prestige for their achievements in the domain of female work, but women could also gain prestige for excelling in warfare (Albers, 1989 : 135).

Minh Ha revealed the elevated status of women in the traditional non-state societies of Gabon in contrast to monetary, industrialized economies: "In a subsistence economy men are obliged to earn their livelihood in cooperation with women without exploiting them. In a monetary economy, however, the thirst for comfort and profit pushes men to exploit women and chase them from the domains of political and social action (Minh Ha, T.T. 1989 : 108).

This description of women's roles and status presents a sharp contrast to our understanding of gender division of labour and attendant questions of power and dominance in contemporary society.

1.4.2 Variations in Gender Regimes: The Matriarchy Debate

A group of social scientists are of the view that woman enjoyed a higher status in the matriarchal societies. However with the advancement of civilisation, the matriarchal system has been replaced by patriarchal ones. Various scholars have contributed to the matriarchy debates especially taking clues from the primitive societies. Let us examine the process of its replacement.

a) **Bachofen's Thesis**

Initial interest in the question of matriarchy was generated by Bachofen's work *Das Mutterrecht*—to date the earliest on the subject. Bachofen tried to establish as moral and historical fact, the primacy of "mother right" which according to him, sprang from the natural and biological association of mother and child. Matriarchy, or the dominion of the mother "over family and state", according to him, was a later development generated by woman's profound dissatisfaction with the series of modifications in the matriarchal family which led to the institution of individual marriage and the matrilineal transmission of property and names". This advanced stage of mother right was followed by a civil rule by women, which Bachofen called a "gynocracy". The rule by woman was overthrown eventually by the "divine father principle" (cf. Bamberger, 1974).

b) **Engels' Thesis**

Outside the anthropological tradition Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* provided a starting point for work in this direction. The one question that dogged every feminist researcher looking for the origins of male dominance or patriarchy was the possibility of the existence of matriarchies and the forced seizure of power and political control from women by men. Engels links up kinship to the state by positing that the origin of the state is predicated on transition from matrimony (and matriarchy) to patrimony and patriarchy, which meant the loss of control by women over their own reproductive powers and over material resources.

c) **Impact of Colonialism on Matrimony**

Further, research has also shown that the character of matrimony in different societies underwent significant transformations under colonization. These changes can be best understood if shifts in kinship structures are seen in relation to the shifts in indigenous economies. However, it cannot be said that the impact of colonialism was uniformly adverse for women across the globe. "On the side of native social formations, pre-existing patterns of descent, residence and the division of labour determined whether the status of women would be enhanced, maintained, or diminished by the colonising experience. On the side of colonising relationships, new forms of economic appropriation, the appearance of epidemic disease, and the pressures of Christian missionary activity all played a part in altering the roles of American Indian Women" (Albers, P.C. 1989:140). In general, evidence from American Indian societies suggests that where the dependence on European markets shaped the character of emergent economies in these societies, and where women's labour was subsumed within a male dominant labour process, there was a marked decline in women's status. However, in societies where the dependence on European markets was only secondary, the status of women was relatively stable and in some cases enhanced. Examples from North America are illustrative of this.

1.4.3 Gender and Kinship in South and South East Asia

In a comparative study of kinship systems in South and South-East Asia, Leela Dube (1993) argues that differences in kinship systems and family structures account for ways in which gender operates in various societies. Her central concern in her study was to map the construction of gender in the region. To her gender roles are conceived of and constructed within these institutions. Through this construction women and men are turned into gendered subjects and thus implicated in the maintenance and reproduction of a social systems (1993:2). Further, gender and kinship are mutually constructed, and realised together in particular cultural, economic and political systems. When we

speak of cultural, economic and political systems, the axis on which gender and kinship rest is that of power. Indeed, within this power dynamics women are marginalised.

In South and South-East Asia, Dube finds sharp contrasts in the ways in which gender is constructed in bilateral/matrilineal societies as opposed to matrilineal, patrilineal societies. While asserting that neither matrilineal nor bilateral societies are uniform, she explores differences in notions of family ideologies, that are intrinsic parts of both kinship systems. The basic difference in the statuses of male and female children between patrilineal societies of South Asia and the bilateral and matrilineal societies of South-East Asia is in the nature of their membership of descent groups and family and kinship units. In the former (the patrilineal) the father transmits both social identity and property, with his son as permanent member of his kin group and daughter as a transient visitor. Hence the father is also the locus of power and authority. In the latter, (the bilateral and matrilineal) a child is reckoned to belong equally to both parents, with primacy being accorded to the mother's biological role. Concomitantly, there is greater flexibility in marital residential arrangements, which tend to be extremely prescriptive in matrilineal societies, especially those of South Asia.

The patrilineal societies make heavy social investment on the management and control over female sexuality. The responsibility for "protecting" unmarried girls lies with natal or matrilineal male kin. It gives them the right to exercise absolute power over the women under their charge. Gender in these instances is constructed in terms of the male as protector/strong/virile/powerful, and the female as one with "downcast eyes and a shrinking body". Apart from individual or familial control over women, patrilineal societies ensure that women conform to existing gender ideologies through what is better understood as "corporate control", i.e., the control of women by their entire village, caste and/or community.

On the other hand, according to Dube, relative egalitarianism characterizes the societies of South-East Asia. The elements in the social organisation of this region that seem to have relevance to the presence of egalitarianism are bilateral kinship with its accent on matrilineality and matrilocality, flexibility in the composition of households, the absence of insistence on family continuity, equal rights of inheritance for sons and daughters, access to resources by both men and women, an ethos of non-authoritarian interpersonal relationship between kin and between affines and finally a strong cultural approval for the child remaining with the mother in the event of divorce.

However, Dube concludes with a word of caution regarding the possible contestation between principles of bilaterality and male dominance in South-East Asian Societies. This probably has to do with the fact that in the societies under discussion, both South Asia and South-East Asia, the patrilineal and bilateral principles have one common thread running through them. That is the principle and the assumption of heterosexuality along with its corollary that biological sex and socially constructed gender are identical and there is little room for same sexual preferences.

Learn from Your Experience 1

- Try to find out how the descent of your family is being traced. Is it the same to that of the other families in your locality. Try to get an answer to this.
- Prepare a list of the major activities done both within and outside the home by each and every member of your family in their daily routine.
- Try to find out whether there has been any gender role stereotyping in this division of labour. Has it anything to do with the descent of your family, kinship or caste?

1.5. GENDER CONSTRUCTION AND CASTE

Theories of the origin of caste abound. Let us examine some of the popular theories and their relationship, if any, with the process of gender construction.

There are theories that explain caste in terms of racial origin. There are others that explain its origin in terms of the introduction of occupational specialization. None of these writing, however, looks at caste in politically conscious or gendered terms and they do not address the issues of power, dominance and hegemony as key issues in caste society throughout its history.

A valid exercise would be to study it historically. It might also be useful to look for the circumstances of transformation from pre-caste to caste societies. This exercise would look for the various historically and region-specific occurrences of this transformation.

Any analysis of castes by Indians is by definition political. It either consciously chooses or unconsciously identifies with one of the two positions: (a) supporting the status quo by proposing a case for the concentration of power in the hands of those who already have it, or (b) engaging critically with the status quo by developing a critique of Indian tradition. Needless to say, the most radical critiques of caste and by extension of the Indian tradition have come from intellectuals and political activists, from Dalit groups and anti Brahmin movements, that is, critiques that have emerged from the life experience and world views of these groups. These critiques re-centre caste firmly within the socio-political and cultural realities of those whose labour and sexuality has been traditionally mis-appropriated by the hegemonic groups in caste society, namely the dominant castes.

Where does gender figure in an understanding of caste?

The single most important arena for the gendering of caste occurs in the arena of sexuality. The desire to regulate female sexuality has led to a considerable ritual preoccupation with female purity in the caste societies of Sri Lanka and India. Predictably, male sexuality is not ritualized in the same way. Let us examine some of the rituals.

1.5.1 Rituals and Construction of Gender

Rituals tell us a lot about the construction of gender in particular societies. For instance, Yalman, (1963) speaking of the Kandyan Sinhalese, highlights two important ceremonies.

- i) The most notable rituals for children of this group, the only ones that are gender differentiated is the ear piercing ceremony for girls before they attain puberty.
- ii) The second and by far most significant ritual is the one that marks the onset of male puberty.

Two measures are taken as soon as it is known that a girl has menstruated. The exact time for the beginning of the first period is noted, and the girl is secluded in a chamber. A close male relative of the girl then goes to an astrologer to draw up a new horoscope for the girl. This is in contrast with boys who have only one horoscope, the one that is drawn up at birth. "The menstruating girl should be secluded in a small hut in the compound (or in a room without openings). The door is shut. The girl is said to be in great danger. The segregation is partly to protect her from hostile powers and demons that are attracted to her at this time. And partly to prevent her pollution from spreading." Elaborate ritual surrounds the girl's purification after her first period (Yalman, N. 1963 : 25).

The villager's response to Yalman's question about why only girls are subject to this elaborate ritual relates as much to female fertility as to more honour. They say:

- 1) It protects the fecundity of the womb of the woman.
- 2) "This is necessary since the honour and respectability of men is protected and preserved through their women".

1.5.2 Marriage and Regulation of Sexuality and Reproduction

Alongside the development of such elaborate rituals caste society in general regulates female sexuality through the institution of hypergamy, in which women can only cohabit with men either of their own caste or of a superior caste, not with men whose caste status is lower than theirs. The explanation is simple. Caste society objectifies procreative powers and reproduction. Women as seen through the lens of the dominant castes are mere receptacles for the male seed. The purity of the receptacle (here, women's wombs) then ensures the purity of the offspring and sets to rest doubts about paternity. But again, the control and concern over female sexuality are greatest in the castes which have the highest stakes in the material assets of society.

Every study on caste has talked of marriage networks, endogamy, exogamy being crucial to the maintenance of the system with men regulating the system through the exchange of or control over women. The customary right of male family members to exchange female members in marriage, according to Lerner, antedated the development of the patriarchy and created the conditions for the development of the family. In the case of India, this customary right acquired a further economic significance with the development of private property and caste stratification. The primary consideration in the cementing of ties through marriage was/and indeed still is, the maximising of family fortunes. Women play a crucial economic role not only by providing free domestic labour, but also through their reproductive services. Lerner argues that it was the sexual and reproductive services of women that were cared under patriarchy, not women themselves (Lerner, G. 1986).

1.5.3 Gender and Structured Relationship

Clearly, gender plays a critical role in structuring social relationship in caste society. If we were to look at the actual workings of caste society today, the ways in which relationships, the mechanisms of corporate control, as well as codes of mobility, dress and behaviour are gendered, it will become apparent. Social relationships both between men and women within a particular caste as well as between different castes are monitored by a range of controls that take the form of prescriptive marriage rules. As we know, power and decision making in the matter of marriage is determined by gender, as are transactions like dowry. Further conformity to gender as well as caste prescriptions is ensured through the institutionalized use of violence, this is the essence of what we have earlier referred to as 'corporate control'.

The commodification of women in the marriage market in patriarchal, patrilineal caste society goes hand in hand with prescriptions for women's behaviour and restrictions on their mobility, the dispossession of women in property and inheritance matters, and their absence in local level political and decision making bodies. The entire complex constituting the construction of gender in caste society is a construction that radically devalues the status of women in these societies.

We shall discuss this issue again at length in the next unit.



Dalit woman pleading for justice in Panchayat meeting ! Does caste society care?

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Think it Over 3

What do you understand by caste? Do gender at all figure in your understanding of caste? Try to find out an answer to these questions based on your own experience. That is, your own perceptions of how caste divisions play a role in daily behaviour and in important decisions.

1.6 GENDER CONSTRUCTION: UNIVERSALIST POSITION

Gender construction is a social process. But does it have any universal patterns? Is it applicable in all human societies? There are differences in feminist theory on this subject. Some uphold universal patterns and understand variations as occurring within them. Others prefer to examine each society or culture separately and deny the existence of universal patterns. Let us examine the questions.

a) Transformation of Kinship and Emergence of State Structures

The 1974 Rosaldo and Lamphere's collection "Woman, Culture and Society" asserted rather firmly that no known society in the world is truly gender-egalitarian, and foregrounded a universalist position on male dominance. Scholars, however, noted that male dominance only became prominent with the shift in human societies from pre-state to state forms. Political structures in primitive societies both arose from, and encountered resistance within the kinship bases that organized pre-state societies. Reiter (1977) posits that in "pre-state societies, total social reproduction was organized through kinship. As states gradually arose, kinship structures got stripped and transformed to underwrite the existence and legitimacy of more powerful, politicized domains. In this process, the totality of

social relations ceased to be represented and experienced through the organizational forms of kinship in which non-elite groups lived." She says further that "with the rise of state structures, kin-based forms of organizations were curtailed, sapped of their legitimacy and autonomy in favour of the evolving sphere of territorial and class specific polities" (Reiter, R.R. 1977 : 10). Reiter goes on to argue that women were subordinated along with (and in relation to) kinship with the rise of the state structures. Ortner (1974) picks up this argument and suggests that in state organized systems, marriage may shift from a horizontal to a potentially vertical transaction with a tendency toward hypergamy through which elite women accumulate at the top of the system. She links these structural properties of the marriage system with ideologies requiring sexual purity and protection of women. She qualifies her statement on state-organized systems. Ortner begins with position that the secondary status of woman is a "true universal and a pan-cultural fact". The distinction between pre-state and state organised systems therefore addresses the various cultural specificities that exist under the umbrella of this universal fact (Ortner, 1974: 72).

b) Women as Nature, Men as Culture

The second class status of women, says Ortner, can be accounted for by postulating that women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture. Since it was always culture's project to subdue and transcend nature, and since women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate and oppress them. Women are therefore seen as closer to and more rooted in nature than men are. The categories of nature and culture are conceptual categories and are in some contexts indistinguishable from each other. Ortner puts forth the thesis that woman in general is identified with and is a symbol of something that every culture devalues and every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. "Nature" is one thing that would absolutely fit this description. She goes on to say that every culture is engaged in the process of generating and sustaining systems of meaningful form by means of which humanity transcends the natural existence. It bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interest. We may thus broadly equate culture with notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature" (Ortner, 1990 : 36). Here nature is women, who are universally controlled by culture – i.e., men.

Think it Over 4

Is there any universalist position on gender?

1.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This unit has tried to show you that all the social practices are a matter of construction and these constructions are being evolved and practiced based on certain values, norms, tradition and customs of the society. However social constructions are not value neutral. These constructions are related to power relations in each society and usually these serve the social, economic and political interests of the dominant groups in it. The processes of gender construction have helped to perpetuate the dominance of patriarchal control of men over women. As the process of construction is culture specific, it has been rooted in the ideological and the institutional arrangements of each society. You have seen how the institution of division of labour, kinship and caste have provided the basis of legitimacy of gender construction paving the way for the subjugation and sub-ordination of women in society. Is gender construction an universal phenomenon? You have also gone through the debate

on this question in this unit. We hope you have also been able to raise several questions about the basis of legitimacy and the processes of continuity of gender construction. However, to know these issues in greater detail you should know the institutional and the ideological basis of gender construction. We shall be discussing these issues in detail in the following two units.

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Bilateral** : System of transmission of descent through both male and female lines.
- Corporate Control** : The process of controlling the social, economic, cultural even biological identities of an individual or of a particular group by the prevailing arrangements of the dominant group of the society.
- Endogamy** : Custom of arranging marriage within one's own group, for example caste endogamy, whereby members of a caste group are expected to marry within one's own caste.
- Exogamy** : Custom of arranging marriage outside one's own group. It usually applies to descent group; for example members of caste group are expected not to marry within the same 'gotra' (clan).
- Feminisation of job** : Absolute concentration of women in lowpaid, stereotyped jobs.
- Framework** : A theoretical worldview used to explain a social phenomena.
- Heterosexual** : Marriage between opposite sex partners.
- Hypergamy** : It relates to rule of marriage whereby a lower caste woman gets married to a higher caste man. It also refers to the marriage of a lower sub-caste women with high sub-caste men within the same caste groups. It is also known as anuloma form of marriage.
- Matrilineal** : The custom of tracing descent exclusively through the female line.
- Patrilocal** : A practice whereby a married couple settles in the home of husband's family.
- Patrimoni** : Property inherited from the father's side.
- Subsistence Economy** : A system of production whereby the producers produce only to meet the household consumption need.

1.9 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Mies, M. (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. New Jersey : Zed Books Ltd.

Sangari, K. and S.Vaid (ed.). (1989) *Recasting History*. New Delhi : Kali for Women.

UNIT 2 INSTITUTIONAL BASIS OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION

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2.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In the previous unit of this block we discussed the meaning and dimensions of social construction at length and tried to show how gender construction is shaped within the various cultural apparatus of a society. As a culture specific phenomenon, gender construction is both shaped and perpetuated by the institutional arrangements and ideological foundations in a society. In this unit we will discuss the institutional basis of gender construction. Several questions may arise in your mind as to what are the roles of social institutions? What are their nature and function? What are the fundamental relations these institutions have with the process of gender construction? There are several institutions in society vis, the family, marriage, kinship, market, religion, media, the state and so on. Here to be very specific, this unit will try to:

- examine the role and function of various social institutions,
- analyze the role of the family in gender construction,

- discuss the relationship of caste system to gender construction,
- delineate the role of religion in gender construction,
- examine the role of media and labour market in gender construction and its perpetuation, and finally,
- discuss the role of state in gender construction.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Institutions are the stable arrangements through which various activities are carried out and social relations are reproduced. There are specific institutional arrangements to look after the functions that societies have to perform. These institutional arrangements however, are not gender neutral. Rather many of these institutions help to generate and perpetuate gender-based inequalities in society through various practices. In this unit we have identified some of these practices, for our scrutiny.

This unit begins with a brief discussion on the role of the social institution in general and then it goes further to look into the roles played by these institutions in the creation and perpetuation of gender disparity in society.

The family is one of the basic units of human civilization. Is the function of the family gender oppressive? What are the bases and practices of women's subordination in the family? This unit examines these questions taking into consideration the historical origin of the family, the nature of the patriarchal family and division of labour within the family.

Caste is another important social institution. We specifically discussed the marriage rules and the practice of purity and pollution responsible for gender disparity in Indian society.

Religion plays a crucial role in the process of gender construction by determining the pattern of the ethical value system of its followers etc. which is more often than not gender biased. The paradoxical position of women in religion is discussed in this unit.

Media, market and the state are the modernized and secular institutions of our society. However, are these institutions gender neutral? The gendered approaches of these institutions as reflected in their functioning at various levels are also discussed in this unit especially in the context of unfair representation of women in the media, exclusion and exploitation of women in the labour market and ineffective functioning of the state mechanism for the implementation of its social development policies and so on.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Gender identities are an integral part of our personalities and are acquired as part of the larger role learning process, pervasive in all cultures, called socialisation. Socialisation is a process of learning prescribed and sanctioned operations, roles, beliefs, values, behavior patterns, knowledge skills and so on. Through this process each society and culture transmits its own distinctive patterns on the one hand and on the other conditions the functioning of individuals in a specific direction that is conducive to the maintenance and continuity of human society. In effect, societies determine the development of a limited range of behavior from a potentially enormous range of behavior of which a human being is capable. But how are these done? Through the institutional arrangement of the

society. Let us see how our society effects the confinement.

2.2.1 Role and Importance of Social Institutions

Institutions represent characteristic behaviour pattern of any group on the basis of which a group's behaviour is largely predictable. Groups themselves are collections of certain people. People are brought together for the attainment of certain purposes. They engage themselves in activities using available resources to achieve their targeted aims so as to perform certain societal functions.

Individuals are born in groups and it is within these groups that their identities are shaped. Groups may be of many kinds e.g., kinship, religious, caste, territorial, educational, political, etc. By internalisation of acceptable behavior and repeated transmissions to new coming generations, group interactions and relations assume a pervasiveness that lends them the authority of being institutionalised or established. Such established modes form the base that constitute institutions like family, religion, caste, tribe, state. etc.

Institutions influence individual acculturation through prescription, suggestion, expectation or example, as well as through punishment in case of any significant deviance and in this way maintain the continuity, delivery and reproduction of societal functions. Before we discuss examples of which specific institutions contribute to gender construction, let us try to understand why a social system demands the construction of the two genders; the masculine and the feminine.

2.2.2 Socialisation for Gender Specific Roles

It may seem to be common sense that males are masculine and that the females are feminine. Yet, in thinking like this, we collapse and merge certain genetic, biological, psychological and natural



What makes them different? Socialisation or biological traits?

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

traits with certain behavioural, cultural and environmental traits. As we see in our everyday interactions with men and women, they get defined, of course, by such variables as genes, chromosomes and sexual organs, but more visibly they are sexually defined by such aspects of their behavior as their dress, their posture and gestures, their social roles, including their network of friends and relations, and the particular work they perform.

It is important here to point out a simple distinction between sex and gender. As discussed in the earlier unit while sex is a naturally and genetically determined identity that ordinarily has only two variants among the human species, the male and the female, gender itself is a more complex identity that is a function of culture, having specific beliefs about appropriate behaviour for men and women.

Of course, in most cultures, gender too has only two variants—two sets of behaviour patterns corresponding with the two sexual variants. Yet, cultures across space and time exhibit great variety in ascribing gender attributes to the biological duality of sex. Thus, societies and cultures differ in defining gender roles and gender stereotypes. Together these are understood as the sex/gender role system.

While the Gender Role System is multifaceted, there are three basic dimensions to it. These are:

- i) the assigning of particular personality traits to the two sexes, traits that are held to be polar opposites. Thus, for example males in most societies are considered independent, assertive, aggressive, while females are held to be dependent, passive and gentle.
- ii) the assigning of particular and distinctive activities, spheres of action or work is done on grounds of sex on the understanding that the particular work is essential for the sustenance of the societal system. It is important to note that kinds of activities assigned in different cultures to the two sexes may be different, yet the sexual division of work is pervasive. This gets explained as being the 'natural' order of things.
- iii) the third aspect of the sex role system is the differential valuation by cultures and societies of the two sets of traits described as males and females. The culturally assigned activities or traits linked with males are valued more, than those linked with females.

The sum total of this arrangement is then generally to the advantage of males as against females and results in all kinds of discrimination that is understood in feminist terms as patriarchy. Let us now try to understand what patriarchy stands for and how patriarchy is a common theme in the structuring and operations of all the important institutions of the society.

2.2.3 Patriarchy As a Social Practice

Deriving from the term *patriarch* that stood for a dominant man who exercised authority and control over large households comprising of women, men, children and domestic servants, the term patriarchy simply meant a family system where the father ruled. Feminists have conceptually extended the term to refer to all kinds of male domination and systematic exercise of power in societal systems and relations through which women are subordinated. This patriarchy is experienced by women in various ways such as discrimination, oppression, exploitation, disregard, insult, or violence. The dominant and common theme in all such expressions of patriarchy is control of women. This control itself is exercised on women's productive or labour power, their reproduction, sexuality, mobility, property and other material resources.

Feminists point out that patriarchy is not merely fate of some unfortunate women or the behaviour pattern of a few cruel men. Rather it needs to be understood as a system of social structures and practices. This implies that there are certain structures and practices and also certain ideologies

whereby men are enabled to dominate, oppress and exploit women and women become silent accomplices in the maintenance of these institutionalised patterns.

Thus, feminists explain the systematic and institutionalised subordination of women as patriarchy. It is an important concept that helps understand systems of sexual asymmetry that have wrongly come to be regarded as 'natural', complementary and functional in so many societies and in so many historical periods.

With this broad understanding of patriarchy as a concept, we should now move to understand how it operates via institutions to construct and define gender behaviours, mere privileges and gender constraints. For the purpose of illustration, we will focus on the institution of family in greater detail and subsequently discuss the institutions of caste and class, religion, media and the labour market.

Think it Over 1

Does socialisation contribute to gender construction? Does patriarchy as a social practice refer to disempowerment of women. Try to find answer to these questions in view of your experience in your own society.

2.3 GENDER CONSTRUCTION WITHIN THE FAMILY

The family is one of the most basic institutions of society, indeed one often regards it as the microcosm of society. Yet the family is the principal site for gender construction and for gender discrimination. This institution, whether in its nuclear or joint form, is structured on dimensions of age, consanguinity or affinity and most importantly on gender.

2.3.1 Functions of the Family : Is it Gender Oppressive?

Often described as a functional unit in sociological texts, the family is said to focus its institutional goals towards such important functions as (a) regularisation and channelisation of sex, (b) nurturance and acculturation of younger generations, (c) economic production and distribution of fruit of such production, (d) the establishment and maintenance of mutual relations between the larger kin groups that link individual families to communities and society, and (e) most importantly the legalising of inheritance.

The general understanding is that families are able to perform these important functions because the basic selfishness and individualism of human being is squashed by our socialisation and it is superimposed by sentiments of mutual sharing among members that families nurture, support and encourage. It is also held that families are made adaptable through the process whereby all tasks and activities are carried out jointly by sharing not only the workload but also all items of utility and consumption. This is achieved principally by the sexual division of labour whereby men are said to perform the role of providers and women that of caretakers.

Thus, families are taken to stand for mutuality of interests, lack of individualism, a feeling of jointedness in the generous sharing of work load and items of utility, of interdependence and of security. Feminists, however have found this to be a facade that hides the truth of oppressive structures that help to maintain the boundary of this institution and to ensure its smooth functioning.

2.3.2 Patriarchal Family : A Basis For Women's Subordination

The division of roles and responsibilities, allocation of resources and also the distribution of power

that actually exists within the family belies various popular understandings of the family. The patriarchal family places a higher-value on boys than on girls, and on men than on women in the family. On this basis, it further determines the two gender's access to resources like food, education, wealth, leisure and even space. This inequality in access to vital resources of physical and mental well-being, on the one hand, determines the different foundations for life of a male and female, and on the other hand, constructs the two genders in such a way that men are the decision makers and the locus of power while women have no direct control over even their own persons and their bodies. This powerlessness affects women in such a way that they show traits of isolation, low self-esteem, low confidence, ignorance, non-involvement, dependence and passive acceptance. All these shape their experience of the family. The family no doubt protects them from some of the negative factors operating in the world outside, yet at the same time it subjects them to discrimination, oppression, exploitation and even violence inside the home.

These broad patterns of the subsidiary status of women in Indian households/families have been brought out in several micro studies and corroborating macro data on the differentials in sex-related demographic figures such as sex ratio, life expectancy, age structure of population, death rates, infant mortality rates and patterns, age at marriage, fertility rate, literacy, school enrollment for boys and girls, drop out rates, participation in higher education, employment, work participation and unemployment figures etc. In each one of these women are at a disadvantage. Thus, having deconstructed the myth of a happy, harmonious, adaptable, functional family through a brief look at it from the women's perspective, let us now focus on the structural arrangements that are the cause of the problem.

Understanding these inequalities in institutional terms requires explanation of the following three basic concepts.

- i) Historical origins of the family
- ii) Sexual division of labour
- iii) Heterosexuality

2.3.3 The Historical Origin of the Family : Changing The Natural Order

The 'naturalness' of the nuclear family gives a false impression of it being trans-historical and therefore omnipresent and omnipotent. This myth was first exploded by nineteenth century anthropologists on the basis of comparative ethnology. Later Engels, basing himself on the ethnological expositions of Morgan and Bachofen (discussed in the previous unit), located women's subordination in the institutionalisation of the patriarchal family, and showed that this was itself a result of development of private property and the emergence of a system of classes. Engels postulated that throughout the stage of 'savagery' in human cultural evolution, subsistence economy based on food gathering hunting and other activities, corresponded with large matrilineal, matrilineal communistic households gave a marked authority to women. In the stage of 'barbarism', agriculture and animal husbandry developed; these activities, and the accumulation of herd and surplus grains together brought to human societies the notion of property. Both these activities increased the economic significance of men and their urge to retain the control over power and property for themselves and their own children. These in turn led to the domestication and confinement of women. Women's sexuality came to be regulated and controlled, and monogamy and patriarchy came into existence. The 'world historical defeat of the female sex' saw the overthrow of the earlier notion of mother-right. Though Engels exposition may today be criticised for being simplistic, mechanical, speculative and limited by the knowledge of his time, yet it certainly provides a historicity to the family and a logical explanation of why women's gender roles in most societies are restricted to producing heirs to inherit property, and also why women's household labour is regarded as a private service. By giving a

historicity to the institution of family, Engels broke the myth of the natural or 'god-given' family and pointed to the essential nature of social construction of the institution in a way that favoured certain vested interests. It therefore opens up the possibility for an alternative arrangement of the institution of the family based on more equitable principles. Let us now look at the remaining set of concepts in this light.

2.3.4 Sexual Division of Labour and Housewifisation

Traditionalists have argued for the sexual division of labour on grounds that it is natural, god-given, complementary, and teleologically, even essential for the continuance of the human race. At times the fact that the sexual division of labour has survived over time is used to argue for its 'naturalness'; at other times, women's biological weakness is said to have been at the base of the social institutionalisation of 'harder' jobs for men and 'simpler' household chores for women. This dichotomy in terms of *hard* and *soft* jobs has led to the trivialization and subsequent devaluation of women's work and it has wrongly perpetuated the myth that women do not or cannot engage in work that requires hard physical labour. This myth negates the actual life experience of an overwhelming majority of women who do back-breaking jobs that involve, besides routine domestic chores and productive labour in the fields or factories, activities such as collection of water and fuel and carrying heavy headloads over long distances. Only a small minority of women belonging to the middle and upper classes have leisure on their hands, and this myth hides the experience of the majority of women.

Therefore, the notion of complementarity that the sexual division of labour connotes, is itself mythical. Instead, there is an institutionalised hierarchy in the relations between men and women that leads to asymmetry in gender roles and expectations, and to the exploitation of women by men. The common belief that men and women simply divide different tasks between themselves hides the



Housewife, Burden too many !

Courtesy ; Atul Yadav, New Delhi

fact that while men's tasks are usually considered as truly human ones, and are regarded as conscious, rational, planned and productive, women's tasks of household and child care are seen as extensions of their physiology, and therefore as not real work. Thus in effect women's work conceptualised as domestic work becomes private and personal work that goes unrecognized and unpaid. This itself forms the institutional base for the backwardness of women, confining them within the four walls of the home with little contact with the business world and also for the appropriation of women's services and the products of their labour by men. This holds true not only for middle and upper class women restricted from economic activities outside the household but also for lower class women who find themselves socially burdened and restricted by the institutionalisation of this ideology such that they shoulder multiple responsibilities and dual burdens without proper recognition.

This institutionalization of the sexual division of labour may have existed from the beginning of social formations yet it was not synonymous with the contemporary dichotomy of housework and outside work under capitalism. Maria Mies, a socialist feminist, has pointed out that in the precapitalist era, the family was the basic economic unit of society engaged in activities that can broadly be classed as natural functions, material functions and human spiritual functions. Women worked alongside men and were involved in all these activities. While there was a division of labour within the family based upon age, sex and family position and such division between the family and the world of commodity production. Women's work was not yet trivialised as domestic work, rather it was regarded as essential work for future generations. It was with capitalist enterprise that a split came about between the household labour of women and 'socialised labour' in centralised, large scale corporate units. With the removal of productive labour from the household, women's domestic production got reduced to domestic work. The pressure of 'housewifisation' was the product of the labour movement in the late 19th century and early 20th century, and it further institutionalised this growing demarcation of men's from women's work. This call for housewifisation was itself a reflection of the patriarchal attitudes of the working class that were shaped by industrialisation and colonial expansion; they made possible a system of one male bread winner' and a family wage. Its consequence has been the disguising of the contribution that domestic labour makes to capitalism on the one hand and on the other hand, the creation of the myth that housework is not real work.

2.3.5 Heterosexuality : An Oppressive Condition for Women

Just as the naturalness of the nuclear patriarchal family has been challenged so has the institution of heterosexual unions been challenged as an arrangement that has no 'natural' basis. It is now held to be a social regulation of sexuality that operates in cooperation with the principle of the sexual division of labour. This system of ordering roles and responsibilities demand unions containing at least one woman and one man, that is, heterosexual unions. This prescribes only one expression of human sexuality and represses other, and thus restricts women to exploitative, oppressive and often violent unions with men. The radical feminists in the 1970s suggested doing away with relationship with men and focusing on those with their own sex (lesbianism) as a necessary and legitimate method for counteracting patriarchy.

In this context, it would be worthwhile to mention that homosexuals are also oppressed by the same system that oppresses women. Thus, there have been calls for a transformation of such sex/gender institutionalisations based on sexism that actually exaggerate gender differences or suppress similarities between men and women and this make certain forms of socially approved sexuality obligatory.

Having explained at length the various structures that operate within the institution of family to differentiate and construct the two genders, we will now move, briefly to some other important institutions in society.

Think it Over 2

- Can you highlight the various dimensions of gender oppression that shape within the patriarchal family?
- How does the sexual division of labour lead to housewifisation of women?

Try to get answers to these questions reading the previous sections of this unit carefully.

2.4 GENDER CONSTRUCTION WITHIN THE CASTE SYSTEM

The institution of caste and its connection with gender again primarily focuses on the control of women's sexuality. The caste system operates on the one hand to monitor strict maintenance of caste boundaries and on the other to ensure the inheritance of family name and property to legitimate heirs.

Do You Know ? 1

There is, firstly, the sexual use and abuse of women, which is an aspect of the inequality of power, seen in its most extreme form in the treatment of women of the lowest rank by men of the highest; this is the aspect of the problem that has received most attention....

The sexual use of women of inferior rank by men of superior rank would not acquire its characteristic forms in societies divided by caste or race if the ordinary relations between men and women were not marked by asymmetry. The asymmetry characteristic of such relations in general is merely reinforced when the man belongs to a superior race (or caste) and the women to an inferior one. The normal requirement of asymmetry would be seriously upset if the women belonged to a superior and the man to an inferior rank. The stricter the demand for asymmetry in the ordinary relations between men and women, the more severe will be the sanctions against the reversal of roles....

An anuloma union is one between a man of a superior and a woman of an inferior *Varna*, and subject to certain conditions, it is accepted. The rule in its broadest interpretation allows a Brahman man to take, in addition to a Brahman wife, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra wife; a Kshatriya man is allowed to take over and above his Kshatriya wife, a Vaishya and a Shudra wife; a Vaishya man may take, in addition to a wife from his own *Varna*, one also from the Shudra *varna*; a Shudra man has to be content with only a Shudra wife. *Pratiloma*, on the other hand, is the union of a woman of a superior *Varna* with a man of an inferior one, and it is condemned in the severest possible terms. The lowest of human beings, akin to beasts, are the Chandalas who are described as the offspring of *pratiloma* unions between Brahman women and Shudra men (Manusmirti, 1964, p. 405; cf. Beteille, 1992).

2.4.1 Anuloma and Pratiloma Vivah and Exploitation of Women

By dividing the population into four major *Varna* groups: the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra, the caste system originally structured a hierarchy of occupational groups that were essentially hereditary and endogamous in nature, though there were exceptions allowed within defined limits. Thus though castes were endogamous, the rule was relaxed in the case of women marrying upwards in the caste hierarchy or men marrying downwards in the caste hierarchy. This arrangement worked with the understanding that while a man stood to lose nothing by marrying women of lower castes, a woman brought to herself and her family a higher social ranking by marrying above her

natal caste group. Thus an important principle in directing alliances between castes has been the role of hypergamy whereby a woman must marry into her own caste or sub-caste or the one that is ritually higher, but must not marry into a lower sub-caste or caste. A man, marrying with a woman from a lower sub-caste is known as 'Anuloma Vivah' literally meaning with the hair i.e., legitimate and approved. The reverse, where a woman marries beneath her position is called 'Pratiloma Vivah' literally against the hair, i.e., against the approved rule. One may mention here the case of the Kulin Rarhi Brahmins of Bengal who had Kulin Brahmins as the highest subsection among a total of 4 subcastes. Following the rules of hypergamy, women in Kulin Rarhi Brahmins of Bengal had no option but to marry a man belonging to the Kulin subcastes, while a Kulin man had the choice to marry into any one of the lower sections. This created peculiar situation for these unfortunate Kulin women. Since parents had difficulty in finding socially legitimate grooms for their daughters, the situation deteriorated to worst forms of exploitation of women through child marriage, bigamy and early widowhood due to the extreme age difference between the bride and the groom.

2.4.2 Practice of Purity and Pollution: Meaning for Women

At this point it is necessary to point out to the students that purity and pollution concepts that are an integral part of the Indian caste system, had different constructions for the four caste groups. Purity and pollution within the caste system has its expression among other things in such rules of behaviour as vegetarianism, teetotalism and in controls over women. The higher the caste in the ritual hierarchy, the more binding were the rules of vegetarianism and teetotalism. Also higher castes necessarily increased their control over their women. These controls in social and economic terms meant the disinheritance of women from property such as land and also their removal from public life and productive economy leading to their domestication with strict rules of seclusion or 'Purdah'.

It is interesting that castes that were upwardly mobile and sought to improve their ritual position in the caste hierarchy imitated the higher castes in observance of all these rules and specially increased constraints on their women. This implies that the constraints on women due to their caste identity worked more against those women who belonged to ritually and socially higher castes than against those who belonged to the lower caste in some respects. Lower caste women enjoyed relaxed rules of vegetarianism and teetotalism alongside their men and were active participants in both productive economy and public life; but their labour and sexuality was exploited by upper castes. It has been suggested that the sexuality of the higher caste women presented a threat, and if uncontrolled would pose the danger of pollution of the higher caste groups through sexual contact between higher caste women and lower caste men. The social exclusiveness as well as biological purity, that the higher castes boasted, that they would be corrupted by lower caste men through their contacts with higher caste women. Apart from this ritual purity, what was at stake was also the material possessions of each caste group that were sought to be contained and redistributed within the caste or sub-caste itself. Thus, since daughters were given a part of the family's movable property as dowry, there were material reasons for ensuring that the property was redistributed as closely as possible within the caste group and did not go too much outside it. Historically also it has now been established that as the patriarchal upper castes consolidated their economic ascendancy and as they fought to defend themselves from challenges to their supremacy, they tightened both caste and gender divisions.

2.4.3. Changing Caste System and Women's Subordination

Today many constraints on women due to caste identity have been relaxed and capitalist India has seen the emergence of new social classes. However, this has not meant disappearance of the subordination of women. The emergence of new classes has meant control of women in new and

different forms from those under the caste system. Domestic seclusion, economic dependence through restriction of participation in productive economy, extensive restraints on sexuality through constrained marital alliances operate much less today for most women belonging to the upper and middle classes especially in urban India.

However, controls exist in terms of the kind, quality and purpose of education women are given, the type of employment they are permitted to seek, the harassment and sexual violence that they are forced to face in pursuing education or work, or through the dual burdens that employed women shoulder due to increased economic responsibilities. Today some classes draw prestige from the educational and employment status of their women for this has brought them material and status benefits. Thus, though the form of control has changed, there is subordination nonetheless. What is positive about this transformation is the fact that with economic independence some women have started challenging the cultural restraints on their sexuality and independence.

Learn From Your Experience 1

Collect information on the marriage practice(s), and practice of purity and pollution (in view of the items discussed in this unit) from any two families belonging to two different caste groups from your neighbourhood. Try to find out whether these practices are at all gender oppressive.

2.5 GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN RELIGION

The institution of religion operates at two broad levels in society and effects men and women differently. Let us examine some of these aspects.

2.5.1 Role of Religion in Policy Formulation

Firstly, it plays a pervasive role in gender construction at the level of culture itself. At this level it influences and conditions societal notions on such issues as sexuality, marriage, family and its operations, inter personal and inter-group relations and so on. Through the process of socialisation these aspects become so ingrained a part of our lives that they are naturalized and are seldom challenged or confronted. This process gives it a degree of historical continuity. However, the realities of socio-economic existence of people also play a crucial role on such religious and cultural patterns, and work to adapt and transform them according to contemporary requirements. For example women's advancement in education alongside harsh economic realities has pushed many women into the paid labour force in present times and this has served to transform the cultural milieu as it had been defined for women by religion earlier.

Secondly, religion is also an institutional force. At the level of national and community lives it influences policy formulation, dissemination and implementation. This influence of religion as an institution does not have the same continuity as it influences on cultural behaviour. However, the two are not yet isolated. The state as a powerful institution in itself, poses a serious threat to women's liberty when it aligns itself with obscurantist and fundamentalist religious forces. An example of such an alliance may be seen in the case of the state endorsement of oppressive personal laws that define issues of marriage, inheritance, divorce, etc., to maintain the privilege of men.

2.5.2 Women's Paradoxical Relation with Religion

Women have a paradoxical relationship with the institution of religion. Women appear to be more religious and spiritual than men across societies and cultures. In the Indian Hindu family itself, one

is more likely to find women involved in prayer, worship, fasting and observing rituals. The fact that Hinduism is relatively an unorganized religion and it makes the family the centre of religious activities all the more and thus the Hindu housewife has traditionally handled number of religious obligations performed at home as part of her domestic duties. Moreover, it has been suggested that women enter religion and seek solace from the supernatural because the domains of socio-political and socio-economic power structures are closed to them. Religion, in such frustrating circumstances, comes as a positive force that gives women inner space to confront their daily survival struggles and brings emotional rewards of peace, happiness and contentment. While this aspect of women's religiosity seems true the other aspect of the paradox is also equally true.

This pertains to the fact that scriptures of all religions contain views that mostly condemn women to a secondary existence and that are also explicitly oppressive to women. It is revealing that there is a continuity in all the great religions with regards to their stand on such issues as contraception, abortion, the use of veil, female chastity, etc. Besides, the scriptural texts associated with religion are also oppressive and exploitative of women. The case of the *devdasis* comes to mind which involves the practice of dedicating young girls at childhood to a goddess and their initiation into prostitution when they attain puberty. Widow immolation glorified as 'sati' and the shameful reality of molestation and rape of women during communal violence as a means of punishing the other religious group are also cases in point. Thus, the institutional construction of gender by religions offers a complex of oppressive, regressive and exploitative elements alongside humanistic elements of morality, compassion, spirituality, and solace.

Think it Over: 3

Do religions contribute to the construction of gender? Can you highlight some aspects of the paradoxical relation of women with religion?

Try to find out answers to these questions in view of the discussion held in the previous section of this unit.

2.6 GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE MEDIA

The media exercises tremendous impact on society especially today with the information technology revolution and therefore, while discussing institutional bases for gender construction, we need to focus on this very influential and pervasive institution.

2.6.1 Media Content : Unfair Representation of Women

Let us first of all focus on the issue of media content itself for it is here that we see most clearly the institutional tendency to apply different criteria to the depiction of men and women. Media, be it literature or visual text such as photography, advertising film, television, magazines, posters, etc. all depict women in a way that defines what it means to be a woman in our society. Thus, media images continuously repeat what women are like 'naturally', or rather what women ought to be what they should be capable of or incapable of. The underlying point is always how they are essentially different from men. Moreover, since the reference point is always men, women are continually, defined as wives, mothers or sisters, etc are often shown as helpless victims of men's lust and violence or else stupid, brainless, decorative creatures. Thus the reality of women's potential as human being is systematically obscured. Moral or intellectual qualities of women almost always get eclipsed by the emphasis on sexual attractiveness and thus they come to be judged

in terms of the latter rather than the former. This obviously leads to a projection of women as inferior to men in all the cultural settings. The dichotomy between what cultures uphold or value and what they project onto the women, they become conspicuous.

Thus not only do women not get their fair share of representation, but the media has also strengthened and reinforced existing stereotypes of women. An interesting example of how the media works lies in the fact that while our constitution and law grant equality and equal participation in job opportunities, the ideology projected and reinforced by media prevents women from using these opportunities. Ideology can be a powerful source of inequality as well as a rationalization of it and today it is the media which is the chief carrier of anti-woman ideologies.

2.6.2 Patterns of Women Viewership

Let us also look at a related theme in this context i.e., women as media users. A recent UNESCO study on television viewing patterns found some interesting and identical patterns in its study of nine countries: Australia, Bulgaria, Hungary, India, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Philippines and Sweden. Women are avid media users in these countries, and their media preferences are different from those of men. In contrast to sports and action oriented programmes and information conveying programmes especially news, preferred by men, women opt for popular drama, music/dance and other entertainment programmes. Interestingly, these patterns of media preference correspond to the actual portrayal of men and women in various kinds of programmes. It may be that each sex tends to favour that media content which makes visible their own gender. This visibility may be either in terms of the depiction of characters or in the very issues that are focussed on. In this context, it is pertinent that women feel that women's issues do not get priority on media, and that their concerns do not get enough airtime on serious programmes.



Women in Media: Need for a balanced projection.

A related issue regarding women as media users comes from the fact that advertisers today, have come to regard women as a distinct constituency and are vying with each other to bombard them with images of consumer goods, and target their products at them. This has meant increased consumerism and stress on women as efficient home-managers who have to make the right choices. At the same time, the objectification and commodification of the female body as a selling point continues unabated.

2.6.3 Patterns of Women's Employment in Media

Most importantly, while discussing this institution, we need to focus on the issue of media employment for it is in this politics of numbers that the chief problem lies. Despite much talk of changes in employment patterns within the media in India, a recent study done by the Media Advocacy Group in Delhi on behalf of UNESCO, revealed that women form only 12.15% of the total number of full time employees in Doordarshan and All India Radio. Moreover here also women are concentrated at the lower, administrative levels rather than in production and editorial posts. They are almost invisible in the technical areas where jobs are highly skilled and highly paid.

It is interesting that UNESCO data revealed that over the past 15 years women are increasingly opting for higher level mass communication education. Data from 81 countries have shown that women form more than 50% of students in journalism and communication studies in 50 of these countries, yet there is an employment gap for the proportion of women finding jobs in mass media. Indeed, jobs do not tally with the numbers who are trained. Thus, men continue to exercise a monopoly in terms of real power within the media.

Learn from Your Experience 2

Watch television programmes for two hours each for two days and try to develop a brief note on the projection of women in the media. Try to find out whether the ideology of gender role stereotyping is taking shape on T.V.

2.7 GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The labour market is generally assumed to be neutral in its operations with profit goal and maximization of benefits as the two basic norms that direct all its activities. However, the professed neutrality of the market is exposed if we examine the broad patterns of employment along gender lines in India.

2.7.1 Patterns of Women's Employment

Very broadly we see that :

- a) The female labour force in India continues to be concentrated in farm-based subsistence activities. According to the 1991 census, agriculture employs 70% of working population and about 84% of economically active women.
- b) The terms of employment of most female workers are unfavorable as compared to men with less wages, unhealthy and stressful conditions at the workplace and with little social and economic security. It is significant to point out here that women constitute 90% of the total marginal workers according to 1991 census data.

- c) Women have limited entry in non-agricultural sectors and mainly in low skill wage activities. While 1991 figures show a decline in percentage of female main workers in household manufacturing industry in rural and urban areas, there is 2 to 3% increase in the percentage of women in other services in rural and urban area. Although women's employment in the organised sectors has revealed significant increase in absolute numbers from 1971, yet even now as compared to men, the representation of men in the organised sector is almost six time more. Of the total employment of women, the organised sector accounts for only 4%. An overwhelmingly predominant representation of women in the organised sector is in community, social and personal services which are relatively low paid and low skilled jobs. They are represented only to the amount of 1.6% in transport, storage, communication, and financing, insurance, real estate and banking services which are highly paid and skill based services.
- d) The unemployment rates for women are significantly higher than men and for urban women more than those for rural women. At the end of 1994, the number of women on the live register of the Employment Exchange in the country was 80.90 lakhs.

These statistics in terms of differential gender representation in the market require to be explained and we will attempt to explore some of the institutional bases for it.

2.7.2 Gender Differential: Product of Gender Construction?

Traditionally the differentials in representation of women and men in the labour market and also the differentials in wages have been explained on grounds of low productivity of women, their low levels of human capital in terms of appropriate skills and training, and on grounds of family responsibilities that form an obstacle to more active participation in the market. These form only part of the story. The other part draws from a variety of reasons that are given below:

- a) The cultural understanding of what should constitute men's jobs and what should be the primary responsibility of women is one of the most important factors in deciding that the private sphere of the household is the exclusive and the most appropriate workplace for women and that the public domain is most appropriate for men. This gendering of workplaces derives from a faulty understanding of biological differences and aptitudes of men and women. Women's aptitudes are judged on the basis of the present sexual division of labour, and they are seen as care takers of young and the old, the sick, as educators of the young, as food producers and homeworkers. Their sexuality is made to carry implications of beautification, passivity and seduction. These aspects of their gender are in turn seen to define their workplace even when they enter the market. That is why there is an overwhelming concentration of women in services to do with food productions, nursing, teaching, reception and clerical jobs, telephone operators and such like.
- b) Another important factor affecting the representation of women in the labour market stems from the conditions under which women enter the labour market. Usually in India this happens when there is no earning male in the family, male earning is not enough, or when men do not share their income with the family. These are largely situations of crisis. Families, therefore, do not invest in the education and skill development of their girls and women as a normal course. The perception of women as labour reserves or as additional income earners, therefore, perpetuates itself, the stereotypical backward image of women. This in turn leads to low skill development, which restricts women to inferior jobs with low payments and insecurity which again maintain, the subordinate position of women in patriarchal families. Thus, we see that the most important part of the story of the under representation of women in the

labour market derives from specific aspects of household relations that create systematic disadvantages for women.

- c) In conclusion, one must point out that since the last two decades especially since the 1980s women's work force participation has shown an increase in the face of decline/constancy of male participation rates. This has been upheld as a phenomenon of global feminisation, and the process, as argued by some, to have at long last addressed women's grievances in the job market. This view appears to be premature for on the one hand job segregation along gender lines continues and sex stereo-typing is hardly declining and on the other hand, areas now opened to women are characterized by low wages, limited opportunities for advancement and occupational hazard to health. Moreover in the face of the structural adjustment programme, with the withdrawal of state from welfare sector, there is an effective intensification of time and energy for women, and the double burdens they shoulder have increased manifold.

Think It Over 4

What are the patterns of women's employment in India? Do cultural factors contribute to their disadvantaged position in the labour market? Read the previous section of this unit carefully to get answers.

2.8 STATE AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION

Having discussed some of the basic institutions and their constructions of gender to the disadvantage of women, one finally comes to the most powerful of institutions of contemporary societies—the state. The state in the functionalist understanding sets up administrative and legal structures on the basis of neutrality and equality and thus holds together competing groups and interests for the welfare of the nation. I.e., for the good of all members rather than for the interests of the dominant class(es). This should mean that one may look to the state for providing the panacea for ensuring that all other institutions in society meet women's needs and effect an equitable distribution of resources along gender lines. However, ideas of equality and neutrality in case of the state, as in the case of the other institutions, remain merely official and are not actually operationalised. Contrary to such official concepts the informal operations of the state have been in the interest of specific classes and patriarchal powers and have in fact addressed the implicit goals of these powers. Moreover, all these institutions are mutually constituted and shape each other's outcomes.

State policies shape intra-household outcomes, but equally, households with their practices and unofficial rules can subvert or constrain state activity. The law that gives girls equal rights as their brothers to their father's property is thus a state policy that has shaped outcomes of household property distribution. Yet the practice continues whereby girls abdicate their rights of inheritance in favour of their brothers and in this way households subvert state efforts for more equitable distribution of wealth at the intra-familial level. Similarly community norms and organisations can block the ability of states to improve individual circumstances, a situation that arose in the famous Shahbano case. Again, market-based processes feed back into household relationships and determine them. In other words, the discrepancy between male and female wages contributes towards the economic and social dependency of females on males within the family, and the state shows very little initiative by way of intervening in this process.

This is not to negate the fact of positive interventions by state, for example in India, the state has

provided guarantees of women's equality in its constitution. Moreover, the state in the last few decades has introduced a series of machineries, policies and such actions that have focused on the development and improvement of women. Indeed the Indian state is today playing a crucial role in developing institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. **Yet again there is a paradox.** While formulating and implementing development related policies the state in many countries including India operate within the dominant patriarchal ideology and transgresses in the spheres of people's reproductive choices, religious beliefs, interpersonal relationships and even dress and behaviour patterns. The state has itself become conspicuous in supporting and advocating particular religious, ethnic, communal, linguistic, class and patriarchal interests. Indeed the state has operated through the institutions of family, religion, media and market to push forward a patriarchal ideology, especially the understanding that women are primarily housewives and mothers. Research in development studies has shown that contradicting its professed goals, state policies have created gender inequalities in land rights, labour use in agriculture, employment patterns and sectoral representation, access to education and health facilities and laws pertaining to family issues.

Having identified this role of the state in creating and reproducing women's subordinate position in the society, we must also recognise the power and significance of the state as custodians of society and of the underprivileged. The state has in its potentialities the power to represent a far broader canvas of interest than other institutions and if the political will exists to work in the interest of women, it can successfully supersede structural constraints posed by other institutions to create more gender just society.

Think it Over 5

Does the state contribute to gender construction? Does the state have the potentiality to remove the constraints of gender inequality? Discuss in detail in view of your own experience as a development activist.

2.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The institutional arrangements of society have not only generated gender stereotyping, but also perpetuated it making women's position subordinate to men. In the family through the well articulated process of socialisation and sexual division of labour in the caste system, through the practices of purity and pollution and hypergamous forms of marriage and through traditional religious beliefs and values, gender construction is also perpetuated. The process of gender construction is also perpetuated and inculcated by the secular institutions of society, vis. the media, labour market and the state. What is important to note here is that these arrangements have placed women in marginalised and disadvantageous position.

2.10 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Affinity** : Relationship through marriage.
- Consanguinity** : Relationship through blood and common-ancestor.
- Dual-burden** : Burdens of doing household activities and paid job outside the home simultaneously.
- Endogamous** : Practice of marriage within the group, for example caste endogamy.

- Evolutionary** : Gradual process of change from one stage to another. You may think the evolution of human civilisation from one stage to another.
- Housewifisation** : A process whereby women are made to be concentrated within the household activities mainly withdrawing from public sphere of activities.

2.11 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Agarwal, B'na(ed.) (1991) '*Pairarchy and the Modernising State : an Introduction*'. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

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UNIT 3 SOCIALISATION AND IDEOLOGIES OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION

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3.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In the earlier units we have introduced you to the meaning and processes of gender construction and the institutional bases of gender construction. In this unit we shall talk about the ideological basis of gender construction. This unit specifically aims to highlight the role of socialisation and ideologies in gender construction. Through socialisation ideologies of particular kind(s) are inculcated and perpetuated. Here you may have to confront some fundamental questions as to: What are the major ideologies that help to subordinate women? Whether socialisation is gender neutral? Has the pattern(s) of socialisation remained the same in India over the years? What are the implications of changes in the patterns of socialisation for women? This unit aims to discuss some of these questions in greater detail. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the concepts of socialisation and ideology and relate them to the process of gender construction.
- Analyse the processes of gender construction through socialisation at different stages of life viz. childhood, adulthood and motherhood.
- Discuss the new trends of socialisation and their implications for women.
- Examine the paradoxical position of women in Indian society caused by the scriptural and ideological formulations on the one hand and the empirical reality on the other.
- Identify the alternative progressive ideologies for reconstructing gender in general and restructuring the position of women in the family and society in particular.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Socialisation is value based since it inculcates particular kind of the norms and standards of society among its new members. Gender based socialisation obviously is a value based process whereby selected social ideals are used to socialise women from their childhood to be subdued, dependent, invisible, passive and oppressed. Social myths, ideals, norms, customs, beliefs, traditions etc. provide a composite ideological foundation for such socialisation. This unit describes this process in greater detail. We begin our discussion by examining the concepts of socialisation and ideology. The importance of socialisation in human life in the process of growing up from childhood to adulthood is discussed in this unit. Here the role of various proverbs on gender, role differentials and role stereotyping are discussed. The role of socialisation during the adulthood and the motherhood and their linkages with the institution of marriage and code of conduct after marriage are also examined.

Socialisation, however, is a dynamic process. The ideals of socialisation also undergo change with the impact of various modernising forces like education, mass communication, urbanisation, modern occupations etc. All these help in the processes of gender construction either by developing alternative ideologies or by enforcing existing ones. We have also discussed these aspects. Lastly we discuss the paradoxical identities of Indian women that emerge out of scriptural and conceptual duality. This unit also searches for alternative progressive image of women which could be made by constructing the image of women within the family and religion.

Having discussed the institutions and structures that promote gender construction we will now try to understand how socialization as a process of internalization of social expectations, work patterns etc. rationalise gender differences and make them both continuous and enduring in our society.

3.2 SOCIALISATION AND IDEOLOGY: THE CONCEPTS

You may be interested to know the meaning of socialisation and ideology at the very outset. Let us begin with these concepts.

a) Socialisation

The process of socialisation has been conceptualized in two ways. Firstly it involves individual internalisation of societal values and norms to the extent that these form a regular part of the individual's personality. This leads to self imposition rather than external regulation since the individual is motivated by a need to conform. Secondly, socialisation forms an integral element of social interaction and its cultural messages are constantly transmitted, exchanged, and transacted by individuals in their interactions with others in the society. Individuals in fact become socialised as they monitor their interactions in accordance with expectations of others.

Socialisation as a process works all through an individual's life span and involves preparation of an individual in accordance with roles that she/he enters as life unfolds. Thus socialisation of the young child has been called the primary stage of socialisation, the secondary stage predominantly involves the school-going child and the adult socialisation refers to the preparatory process of adult actors for playing such roles as that of spouse, parent, employee, employer etc.

b) Ideology

Ideology is a concept that has been variously understood and much debated in sociological discourses.

For our purpose we move with the simple understanding that ideology constitutes a set of related ideas, beliefs, attitudes and opinions that form the base for a particular style of thought that is predominant, serve the interests of dominant groups and classes, and shapes socialization and practices in a cultural context. We will in the course of this unit try to show how ideologies provide rationalization for a dominant and discriminatory patriarchal set-up and how ideologies distort reality to serve certain class, caste and patriarchal interests.

3.3 CHILDHOOD AND GROWING UP

To start at the very beginning the birth of a girl child is most often a tragic event in the average Indian household. In many Hindu families, in the case of first born daughter, parents and relatives often console themselves by calling the little one Lakshmi i.e. goddess of wealth and prosperity, hoping she will bring that and male offspring in future. Subsequent births of female children however put the family in gloom, the mother in a state of harassed guilt of adding burdens to the household, and the girl children in an uneasy situation of being unwanted and even actively disliked.

3.3.1 Proverbs, Socialisation and Ideology

The unwantedness on account of being born as a female is easily conveyed to these unfortunate girls through constant reminders to them: of the hefty expenditure their marriages would entail; of how any investment in them is like pouring water into sand; of how their parent's future is bleak for while they would spend on a plant that will flower in another's courtyard, there will be no support for them in old age. Whatever the details of the refrain, the theme is one



Boy helping mother in the kitchen, breaking the stereotype

Courtesy : Shekhar, New Delhi

i.e. the daughter is 'Paraya Dhan' (custodial property) while the son is 'Budhape Ka Sahara' (crutch against old age). This ideological understanding goes towards the contrasting idealisation of the male child. Newly weds and prospective mothers were traditionally blessed with the wish 'May you be the mother of a hundred sons!'. Today the hundred sons epithet has been pushed aside due to the small family norm but the blessing still pertains to bearing sons. Nobody blesses a couple by wishing them daughters. Also the ritual and ceremonial aspect of many people's lives in India are marked by a number of special fasts and observances that women perform either to have sons or to ensure the long life of sons already born. 'Ganesh Chaturthi' is one such occasion when in several parts of India, mothers pray for long lives of their sons. There are some ritual occasions when the girl child too forms the focus. For example the occasion of 'Kanjak' or 'Kanya Puja', when little girls are worshipped, as the feminine virginal body is taken to be the abode of the Goddess.

Female child who is followed with a male sibling also has some claim to a place in the sun for she is regarded as auspicious, one that brought good fortune to the family. But the light of the house, 'Ghar Ka Dipak', lamp of the clan 'Kuldipak' is only the son. This is so because it is he who under the patriarchal, patrilocal set up will procreate legitimate heirs for the family and thus extend the lineage, and it is he who has the cultural sanction to light the funeral pyre of his dead parents to help bring them salvation.

3.3.2 Gender Differentials, Role Stereotyping and Ideology

Thus the ideological underpinnings regarding who is one's own and who is alien justify and explain differential and discriminatory distribution of family resources such as food, education, health care, space and leisure. In its extreme form it gets manifested in such practices as female infanticide and even female foeticide through the use of new scientific technology like amniocentesis tests. The 'Custodial Property' conception in case of girls is extended to restrict their mobility and therefore their sexuality in accordance to patriarchal requirements. Thus girl children find even their laughter, their walk, their eating habits, and playtime activities strictly monitored. These controls start operating at a young age but tighten with the period of adolescence. Parents and elders are sure that there is no lapse on their part which may lead the girl astray and thence blot her character.

Very often, apart from parental discipline, girls are subject to discipline by male siblings, even younger ones. Often girls are told to wait till they get married and go to their own homes where they may do whatever they wish. This is a clear message to girls that they should never consider the parent's home as theirs for a woman's home is where her husband is. And a good entrance into the husband's home is sought for her by parents, especially the mother, by preparing the daughter in all those duties and responsibilities that would fall on her in her prospective role of daughter-in-law and wife. Thus girls in average Indian households are often weighed down with responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, nursing, etc. in preparation for their future marital responsibilities. In the process they learn virtues of self-effacement and self-sacrifice-attributes that are considered essential for proper socialisation into the feminine role.

In case of male children, their very birth somehow privileges parents and the entire family group. They are the focus of much attention, fuss and indulgence. Even in poor households, they occupy a special position by virtue of which they have claims of greater quantity and better quality food, more parental attention, more opportunities for self development like education and travel, lesser duties and obligations and greater freedom of person. Disciplinary practices are liberal and very often the only authority that controls them is the father. Mothers have little control in terms of discipline even over the young sons in Hindu patriarchal families.

Think It Over 1

Have proverbs and other means of socialisation any impact on gender differentials in our society? Try to get an answer to this question after reading the previous section of this block very carefully.

3.4 MARRIAGE AND ADULT LIFE THROUGH THEIR IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Marriage is indeed the single most important event in the lives of most Indian girls for much of their prior life is spent orienting themselves for this stage of life. The special value accorded to fertility and marriage culturally and ideologically results in the construction of marriage as the only desirable and ultimate destiny of girls.

3.4.1 Cultural Emphasis on Marriage

Marriage as a socialising mechanism posits cultural emphasis in three areas.

First, in learning home keeping skills that has been discussed above.

Secondly, in terms of observing restrictions on sexuality so as to preserve a pure virginal body for one's lord, the husband. These restrictions assume a dramatic significance in many households with the onset of puberty and menstruation. In some parts of India it implies observance of restrictions related to pollution, in other parts it marks a positive elevation of the girl child to womanhood and maturity and is ritually celebrated. Almost everywhere it implies special concentration on the adolescent girl's food intake in the light of her emergent sexuality and prospective motherhood. This is considered necessary to regulate the menstrual cycle, strengthen reproductive organs and add to the fertility potentialities of the girl.

Thirdly, the focus on marriage is to be seen in terms of ritual prescription to young girls whereby they grow up observing fasts, 'vratas', occasions where they pray for good, loving husbands and in-laws. 'Teej' in North India, 'Bhalabair' in Maharashtra, 'Lgangaaur' in Gujarat, 'Shivratri' in Bengal are some such special festivals when there is collective worship by young girls for good husbands.

Moreover, ideology shapes marriage into a landmark event for women, who are led by the common understanding to believe that they will start a new life in their 'own' home. This 'own' however is to remain a myth for a long time. Girls are married young, often in adolescence. Cultural reasons given for the early marriage are primarily that a young girl of impressionable age is more open to adjusting in a new family setting than an older woman with set ideas and also of course the fear that if not married at the right time, she may bring dishonour to the family.

3.4.2 Strict Code of Conduct after Marriage

A new bride usually is accorded the lowest rung in the hierarchical Hindu joint family. She is required to be obedient, subservient and patient especially to older womenfolk and to be ready to work tirelessly and without complaint. This generally continues till another new bride joins the family and thence these duties and obligations shift to her. This early phase of socialisation in the marital home is a testing time for most brides in the joint family. It is set up because the new bride is seen as a threat to the unity of the extended household and the pressures on her relax

only when she gains the confidence of the elders in the household through her correct deportment and sincerity.

The relationship with the husband has traditionally been a relationship not of equality but a complex of guardianship along with sexual partnership which is characterised by a mixture of love and fear, dependence and distrust. Brahminical ideology outlines a strict and elaborate code of behaviour for the wife although it has few instructions for the husband on his conduct towards her.

Do You Know? 1

Laws of Manu

- By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.....
- In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons, a woman must never be independent.....
- Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife.....
- By violating her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world. (after death) she enters the womb of a jackal and is tormented by diseases (the punishment) of her sin.
- She who controlling her thoughts, words, and deeds, never slights her lord, resides (after death) with her husband (in heaven) and is called a virtuous (wife)

Source: Wadley (1988)

In fact the role of the wife has been of the most prominent concern for ancient scriptures, Sanskrit and vernacular, and also for oral traditions. All of these have focussed on this role of a woman to the virtual exclusion of all other relationships that she lives.

Thus heroines in myths and epics like Sita, Gandhari, Parvati, Draupadi, Damyanti, Indrani and Savitri have come to exemplify the proper behaviour of a Hindu wife. This theme of the good wife has as its constituents characteristics of unquestioning devotion, purity, virtue, chastity, uncomplaining self-sacrifice, gentle tenderness and a singular faithfulness that a woman holds on to despite rejections, thoughtlessness and abuse from the husband. Yet this very notion of an ideal Hindu woman was a nineteenth century construction (a subject we will discuss later), and erased many of the inconsistencies, variations and contradictions in ancient myths, epics, scriptures.

The Concept of Pativrata

In this context, it is relevant to discuss the Brahminical concept of 'Pativrata' - a concept that has been particularly romanticized through legend, folklore, folk song and which is reaffirmed through ritualistic observances such as fasts and ceremonies of various kinds. Literally meaning 'one who is vowed to her husband, the concept exemplifies a wife who considers as her religion and duty the service and devotion to her husband and his wishes, and, in thought and deed lives and dies for the good of the husband. This ideal which requires complete self-surrender and self-effacement is moreover constructed to be the good fortune of only the most fortunate and blessed women who are 'Saubhagyawatis' or 'Suhagias' - women whose husbands are alive. Ideologically, only these women are auspicious and fortunate, and are required to nurture this good fortune as

'Pativratas'. Ritually only these women can participate in ceremonies and auspicious occasions. The negative connotations of the same concept are visible in the traditional mistreatment of widows in India who have been held as inauspicious, unfortunate and therefore social pariahs. The good and bad women dichotomy is played to the extreme in ideological terms in case of the 'Suhagin' and the 'Vidhva' (widow) and elaborate codes on food habits, dress patterns, and behaviour are prescribed to control the sexuality of women by patriarchal society. Together, all these make it impossible for a woman to escape the ideologies of marital life.

3.4.3 Motherhood and Coming into One's Own

Mothers and motherhood are continuously eulogised in Indian culture and tradition. This bestows a special status to the otherwise insignificant cultural space given to women. Though there are no clear cut role models in Brahminical scriptures for good motherhood, there certainly is a cultural and ideological understanding of motherhood as a pre-eminent role. Mothers are depicted as sacrificing, loving women who, unlike the wife, are in control of themselves and their children. The result is a whole body of oral tradition and literature that glorify motherhood, make it obligatory for women, and somehow transform a humdrum role into a 'supernatural' one.

In terms of actual experience it is true that despite dismal poverty, widespread unemployment and the drudgery of child rearing, motherhood confers the Indian woman with a purpose and identity that little else in her culture can provide. It has also been pointed out that traditionally Indian brides enter their husbands families not as wives but as daughters-in-law where intimacy with husbands has been consciously discouraged by the extended family. Thus amongst a host of aliens mothers have often related best with their own children. In India, thus a woman is expected and traditionally encouraged to find emotional fulfilment primarily in her relationship with her children.

In fact, intimacy with the husband develops later with the shared responsibility of parenthood and caring for the next generation. Thus it is only with motherhood that an Indian bride has traditionally come into her own as a woman. It is in this role alone that she has been given any recognition in the family, in the community and in the life cycle.

A related element that needs to be pointed out here is that traditionally mothers are held to be asexual. The cultural respect for mothers finds expression in terms of increased safety for mothers in their interactions with other males, and this gets translated into a relaxation of controls and an exercise of independence and power never before available to them. This, along with the fact of their earlier preparations into the dual ideals of femininity as wife and mother, play a significant role in the immense emotional investment in Indian mothers. All these make motherhood without displaying negative thoughts about their confinement in a role that demands hard and often boring work. It needs however, to be pointed out that eulogisation of motherhood in the Indian context has actually imposed a constructed role on women. This in reality has gratified an essentially patriarchal society that gives little actual power to mothers, but makes motherhood an emotional and ideational compensation for an otherwise exploited gender.

Think It Over

Can you explain how the eulogisation of the motherhood role affects the imposition of a strict control on women?

How does the concept of asexual impose the patriarchal values of married life on women?

Think these over and try to find answer to these questions in view of the discussion in the previous section of this unit and your own daily experience, as well.

3.5 SOCIALISATION AND IDEOLOGIES: NEW TRENDS

The integrity of the residential character of the joint family has been affected and families today are showing a trend towards nuclear households. Educational exposure and experiences associated with urbanisation and industrialisation have resulted in a diversification of ability, and maturity, within the family, that had earlier been vested only in the male head of the household and there can be a consequent decentralisation of authority. These have had a corresponding effect on the relaxation in interpersonal relationships for example, the guardian role of a father to his children or the husband's relation to his wife as only one of obligatory duty. Authority has now often been expanded to include demonstrated familiarity, intimacy and affection. So far as the girls are concerned, the change is even more perceptible in the conservative attitudes of the traditional higher caste families. Though the remorse at the birth of a daughter is still largely to be seen and girls continue to be accorded differential treatment yet the aloofness, disinterest and restraint that marked the relationship with her father has generally been abandoned by educated and enlightened parents. Girls' education is increasingly being supported by urban middle and even lower class parents. This makes for a more conscious, aware and vocal daughter who questions discrimination from male siblings and who is now no more conspicuous in case she takes up paid employment.

3.5.1 Change in Marriage and Education

Marriage, however, still continues to be largely negotiated by parents and elders. However, with a decided increase in age at marriage, modern young people are increasingly exercising their choice in marriage and 'love' marriages are now neither as conspicuous nor always socially tabooed as they were only some decades ago.

The educational accomplishments of the bride are now emerging as an important factor in negotiation of marriage and families have started deriving status from the education and employment of their female wards especially among the middle class.

Matrimonial columns in newspapers and magazines are another new development and apparently signify bold departures in the marriage norms especially in the metropolitan cities. However the shift appears to be of degree than of kind for traditional criteria continue to be stipulated in the great majority of these advertisements.

3.5.2 Changing Division of Labour for Working Women

Working women and educated girls in general are moving from the traditional role of submissive self-effacing wife to one who is more of a companion and who shares authority, though limited, with her husband over their small household. Studies show that a small number of women today are helped by their husbands in the area of domestic work. This itself has meant a significant change in the division of labour at home though this help is limited to child care functions. All other housework still remains a woman's job. Though women have not fully shed their earlier seclusion, today, they are more independent, more confident and more vocal about their needs and aspirations than their predecessors. Today's women move more freely with their husbands and assist them publicly. Family elders are less apprehensive than earlier generations about their son's relations with his wife and seem less fearful that conjugal relations may threaten parental authority and fraternal solidarity. The husband-wife couple itself has a more open relationship and there is less drastic separation between the male and female spheres of operation. A co-earner wife often participates in important, even major decisions about the household. The upbringing of the children education, and extra-curricular activities are fast becoming an area of responsibility and authority. Earlier this

role was shared by the elder and important members of the joint family and the mother's role was limited to the satisfaction of the physical needs of the child. Motherhood itself today is being renegotiated in the light of the changing context of women's realities. What do these new trends mean?



New roles, new trends !

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

3.5.3 Gender and Ideology : New Trends and Few Questions

In contemporary family settings the ideological under-pinnings of mythological heroines like Sita and Savitri and of codes of conduct such as those of the Manusmriti may seem irrelevant and without significance. However the ancient Sanskrit texts along with later Sanskrit and vernacular writing as well as oral traditions which set up explicit role models for the higher caste women and became part of our collective consciousness shape our beliefs and attitudes about the proper conduct of women even today. To elucidate, while discussing change in terms of the gender ideology and gender relations in the present context, we do need to raise certain searching questions to ourselves. Some of these are as follows:

How far have we actually come away from the conception and socialisation of women as 'selfless angels of the hearth and cultivated helpmates'? How free are men and women today of psychological bondage to the concept of women being indispensable at home?

With respect to the increased emphasis on women's education we need to question its perceived utility for women and their families. What are the perceived range of attractions today that an educated daughter, wife and daughter-in-law have for the family? Is the increasing emphasis on education for girls being matched by an increase in space being given to girls socially and culturally, to fulfil aspirations that arise out of education or does it simply make them more eligible for marriage? Does it bring discontent for women who can look forward to no achievement other than child bearing?

In other words, what are the cultural prospects for educated women?

Again, in case of increased representation of middle class women in employment - what is the perceived role of employment for women? Is it for buying little extras, for a decent standard of living, for tiding over hardships and fulfilling responsibilities at home, or for her own individual and psychic fulfilment and developmental needs? While it is true that with employment women have broken the enforced seclusion and economic dependence that the caste system imposed on upper caste women yet it has also been observed that class structures have actually built upon the gender division within the caste system, albeit in different forms. Thus class, like caste, continues to define a woman's choice in schooling, marriage and employment, obviously in a different form what it does for men. Studies interestingly point out that much of today's employed women's duties, purposes and identity derive from her husband's class.

In this context some other aspects of a woman's identity - namely, the changes in the criteria of respectability of a woman, are also of interest. To what extent are today's so called liberated, educated and modern women identifying with men and the competitiveness which that concept implies. Such searching questions need to be posed before we arrive at too optimistic an assessment of contemporary socialization processes. Some answers of these questions are discussed in the next section.



3.6 WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: PARADOXICAL IDENTITIES

While on the one hand strict prescription for their role as wives and supernatural expectations of them as mothers is interpreted world-wide as evidence of Indian women being an oppressed and exploited lot, at the same time contemporary women's representation in professions, in politics and in social arenas points to the fact of greater availability of cultural space to them than is available to women in other South Asian societies. Susan Wadley has attempted an explanation of this paradox of higher caste Hindu women by pointing to some conceptual dualities in the scriptures.

3.6.1 Prevailing Perceptions and Contradictions

Females whether Goddess or human are regarded as being fertile and benevolent, and as aggressive and malevolent at one and the same time. The dual characteristics of bestowed as well as destroyer give them powers to bring prosperity or ruin. The cultural logic forwarded for these two contrasting facets of the same person draws from the fact that female is 'Shakti' and 'Prakriti' both. 'Shakti' - energy or energising principle of the universe, and 'Prakriti' (Nature), the undifferentiated matter of the universe.

Herein nature as undifferentiated matter consists of a lower order of attributes - attributes that lack structure that culture alone fosters. This Nature - Culture hierarchical dichotomy is applied to project women as, wanton, uncontrolled force and men as, differentiated and structured beings. Thus though

the feminine principle possesses strength and power it is ideologically held that only the masculine principle is endowed with the ability to direct this strength and power with the usage of the higher code. Culture is required to control nature and drawing from these men are required to control women. Whether the nature-culture dichotomy can be transposed to a cosmology in this way, and from there to derive social practices is open to debate.

However, Wadley makes significant analysis of goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. Goddesses who control their own sexuality and transfer their powers to male gods, for example Kali, are projected as potentially destructive and malevolent. Conversely goddesses who transfer control of their sexuality to the males, and this symbolise domestication through a married state. e.g. Lakshmi and Parvati, stand for fertility and benevolence. In this Wadley finds an explanation for elaborate laws and codes of conduct which prescribe that women should accept more control. It is by creating images of domesticated goddesses. This is how, she holds that patriarchal culture is able to cope with otherwise powerful and dangerous feminine images. She also says that it is within this cultural recognition of the strength of womankind that some women have found openings to wriggle out of their bondage.

3.6.2 Alternative Ideologies

While Wadley has attempted an explanation within the framework of the dominant 'Hindu' gender ideology itself, there are others who have pointed out that while this ideology may have shaped socialization of some people in India, yet it does not apply to every one, which is essentially caste-based, and has never gone unchallenged. Feminists have pointed out the existence of alternative ideologies that have been marginalized by the dominant Hindu ideology and that should be reclaimed. This marginalization of a more liberal cultural and religious heritage was itself a systematic process, that signifies the spread of a Brahminical caste order. Reclaiming this heritage is a difficult process because written history itself is produced by the dominant forces who projected only one version of the story. Alternative sources such as oral histories, archaeological evidences, critical histories, and surviving religious practices and organisations called cultural vestiges need to be tapped to reconstruct the sidelined and the forgotten. Studies based on these have demonstrated a struggle between the male and female principles primarily in two areas - one being in the form of family structure and the other in the realm of religious symbols.

3.6.3 Reconstructing the Forgotten : The Family System

Within family forms the matrilineal and matrilocal family systems appear to have clashed with the coming of the Aryans around 1500 BC. As opposed to indigenous matrilineal family forms the Aryans carried patrilineal family systems. Cultural ethnocentrism made the contrasting descent and residence patterns of the indigenous Indus valley peoples which gave primacy to the female principle appear reprehensible to the Aryans who destroyed these systems in a continuing bid to establish dominance over the indigenous people. The continual existence to date of communities in the Indian subcontinent adhering to the matrilineal principles till today signifies the refusal of some patrilineal groups to accept the conflicting and alien patrilineal system that emphasised the supremacy of the male principle and introduced patrilineal inheritance, residence and authority. The fact that these communities have existed in the margins or fringes as such, e.g. the Nayars of Malabar in Kerala, the Khasis and Garos in Meghalaya and the Brahui in Baluchistan, also gives a spatial dimension to the process of displacement and replacement.

Religious traditions associated with the matrilineal family survived in part the destruction unleashed by the dominant Brahminical patriarchal tradition. It is through glimpses of these alternate

traditions in myths, beliefs, folklore and oral history that we realise that there was a struggle over ideas, meanings and their interpretations in the past, and why they could not be completely eradicated.

3.6.4 Reconstructing the Forgotten : The Religion

Before the coming of the Aryans indigenous people practised a religion that was a mixture of nature worship. Mother Earth represented life in all forms and stood for the sacredness of the feminine principle. Fertility itself being sacred, there were a number of mother goddesses along with other fertility symbols that were worshipped. Kali and Shiva are traceable to these times and the fact that they have survived more than the Aryan God, Indra, is an important evidence itself of a struggle for dominance that did not always favour the Aryans.

Even today in various parts of India mother goddesses are worshipped e.g. Snake cults linked with mother goddess in South India and in the Himalayas, the various goddesses in the hilly regions popularly called Devimata as well as goddesses linked to popular Hindu festivals like 'Holi' and 'Dasserah'. There are even goddesses linked to diseases like small pox and measles and 'Shitala Mata' is one of the names of such local non-Brahminical goddess.

What we see today as goddesses in the dominant Hindu Brahminic tradition need to be distinguished from goddesses of the non-Brahminic traditions. The latter most often display characteristics of being independent, are never married, have control over their own sexuality, can be powerful, malevolent, and if angered given to destruction and ruin. In contrast the former are benevolent, passive, bestowers of wealth, progeny and happiness. Studies have revealed an interesting compromise that the Brahminic tradition evolved as a resolution of the conflict between the indigenous primacy of the female principle and their own belief in primacy of the male principle. This compromise relates to the concept of marriage that was used to co-opt the female principle. Through marriages of non-Brahminic goddesses to male gods of Brahminic tradition, the mother goddesses were brought under the male control, their sexuality was contained, and effectively, powerful goddesses were disarmed and domesticated. Again, here we see the operation of the ideology that women uncontrolled by men are dangerous and that through male control their powers may be directed towards beneficence.

Liddle and Joshi (1986) conclude from their study of local traditions that the religion of common people, or what we call little traditions, still contain elements of the earlier primacy of the feminine principle and the common understanding such as Shitala's hatred of marriage and pregnancy may symbolise the people's rejection of the patriarchal attempts to control women's sexuality.

It is held that 'Shitala' goddess of smallpox gets enraged particularly at the sight of a pregnant woman or a married couple who must never approach the patient or in the latter case approach her singly.



(Goddess Lakshmi)



(Goddess Kali)

Similarly other feminists have tried to analyse several myths in an endeavour to show how myths have been hijacked by a patriarchal society to serve as its justification. An example of the same would be pertinent in this context:

Patriarchal Version

Once in a struggle between the Gods and the demons, the Gods were unable to contain the demons and on sensing defeat, rushed to Kali to help them. Kali defeated the demons and was so delighted with her victory that she started a savage-killing dance. As she danced in fury the earth shook beneath her weight and its destruction appeared imminent. The frightened Gods on failing to stop her rushed to Shiva, her husband. Despite Shiva's entreaties, Kali continued killing and dancing in her bloody fury. Alas! Shiva lay down at her feet. And it was when Kali was to step on him that she came back to her senses for it would have been unforgivable for a Hindu wife to step on her husband. Kali stopped her destruction and the earth was saved.

Moral: Male control is required over dangerous female power. Female power is rendered positive and benevolent through this control.

Feminist Version

Based on studies of sculptures and texts the feminist version focuses on the marital relationship of Shiva and Parvati and invokes the might of the feminine power. Once, Parvati failed to cajole Shiva to respond to her overtures. Angry, she transformed herself into 'Dashahavidya Kali'. Shiva

Shiva to respond to her overtures. Angry, she transformed herself into 'Dashahavida Kali'. Shiva was frightened with this posture of Kali and he literally 'froze'. Herein the Sadashive-form of the god is invoked. Only by becoming immobile could he harmonise again the dynamic energy of the cosmos.

Moral : The dynamic energy of the cosmos is feminine and even gods cannot stand the fury of such energy.

This is only an example from Hindu religion. Similar formulation is also available in all other religions. Here we have presented the case of Hinduism only as an illustration.

Know from Your Experience 2

Identify any goddess which is popularly worshiped in your neighbourhood. Try to learn the popular stories related to the origin and influence of this goddess. Examine and re-examine these stories in view of the examples cited in this section of the unit.

3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We see then that Indian cultural and ideological heritage has potentialities for emancipation and independence of women. Though the dominant ideology has sought to clip the feathers of women through the ideal of domestication, yet there are strong concepts of the basic power and strength of women that women can draw upon in their struggle and resistance to restricted role construction.

This unit has given you a broad view on the process of socialisation and the relationship of ideology with this process. It has been clearly projected in this unit, how various proverbs contribute to the process of socialisation and construction of an ideology which in turn contributes to the process of gender role stereotyping and gender role differentials. The institutions of marriage, motherhood, division of labour etc. contributes towards this gender role stereotyping. However, there are several contradictions within this formulation. This unit has also highlighted these contradictions.

3.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

Ethnocentrism : The attitude that one's own culture or group is superior to others and evaluation of another culture in terms of one's own culture.

Socialisation : A process of introducing and inculcating behavioural patterns, values, attitudes, norms, traditions etc. among the members of the society as per the expected/normative arrangement of the society.

3.9 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Chanana, K. (ed.) (1988) *Socialisation, Education and Women*. New Delhi : Orient Longman.

Liddle, J and Joshi, R. (1986) *Daughters of Independence : Gender, Caste and Class in India*. New Delhi : Kali for Women.

UNIT 4 WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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4.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This is the last unit of this block. In this unit we discussed the status of women in India as emerged through the process of gender construction in our society. After reading this unit you should be able to :

- Explain the elements of diversities and commonalities among women in India.
- Examine their economic status.
- Discuss the educational and health status.
- Describe the form and extent of their political participation in the society, and
- Delineate the various facts of human development and gender issues of India in a comparative frame.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women in India are not a homogenous category. They are divided in terms of caste, class, rural, urban, educational, occupational, linguistic etc. considerations. However, inspite of such diversities there lies a common thread of uniformity among Indian women i.e., the process of marginalisation.

Women in India are the marginalised lots. Their marginalisation has been reflected in their economic, educational, health, legal, political etc. statuses. In this unit we explained some of the indicators of the status of women in Indian society. While discussing their economic status we highlighted the issues of non-recognition, invisibility, double burden of their work. Problems faced by women in the agriculture and in the organised sector etc. are also discussed. There are several factors adversely affecting women's education and health statuses. Some of these factors are also discussed here. The meanings and dimensions of women's political participation and the various forms of these participations i.e., adult franchise, participation in the election, social movements etc. are also explained. In the last section of this unit we analysed the forms and extent of gender disparities in India in a comparative frame. The status of women in India has been compared with those of their counter parts in the SAARC and the developed countries.

4.2 WOMEN IN INDIA : PROBLEMS OF GENERALISATION

There are crucial areas of diversity and commonality in the status of women in India. What are these diversities and commonalities? Let us examine a few of them.

4.2.1 Elements of Diversities

Women in India are not a homogenous category. There are enormous variations among them according to spatial location, linguistic and cultural identities, caste, religious and ethnic backgrounds, diverse class, political and economic position, professions and educational pursuits and so on. For example, the socio-economic and political status of women of North-Eastern region is conspicuously different from that of the women of Rajasthan or other parts of Northern India. Again the upper caste women of northern India also have different cultural, economic and political identities from those of lower caste women of the same region. Educated professional and career women differ significantly in their outlook and cultural identities from the bulk of the illiterate and semi-literate women working in agriculture or in the unorganized sector. Women are also divided on the basis of religious identities, either through differences in codes of conduct for prescribed followers or through the politicization of religion. Similarly, rural women of India face different kind of problems and drudgery from those of their urban counter parts. This problem has further been accentuated with the diverse levels of economic development, intervention of new technology, educational expansion, development activities of the state, spread of mass communication networks etc. as these have contributed enormously towards the growing regional imbalances, rural-urban divide, class and caste polarization. Against these backdrops it is very difficult to generalize the status of women in Indian society.

Indian women are not only located in the diverse socio-cultural matrix but also represent the contradiction of continuity and change. 'Women in India have travelled a long way through hazardous paths of socio-cultural history, and stand today on the threshold of a new era, poised in their endeavour to become full citizens assured of human rights and dignity. It is this effort at integration into the national main stream as equal partners of development that women in India seek today, (NIPCCD, 1998: 11). However, have Indian women been able to break away from the traditional past and other oppressive bondages? The inequalities inherent in our traditional social structure based on caste, community and class have a very significant influence on the status of women (CSWI, 1971 : 3).

4.2.2 Elements of Commonalities

In spite of all these differences, however, there are some important commonalities between women in India. Within each group or social collectivity, be it caste, class, language, religion or ethnicity,

they represent the most marginalised section of these groups. The extent of their marginalisation has been reflected in their economic, demographic, educational, political status in society. Again, their low status is evident in their access to productive resources, property, health care facilities, participation in decision making processes and so on. Women are marginalised in these collectivities mostly because of the gender based social discrimination in all realms of their life. The institutional and the ideological arrangements viz. the pre-existing sexual division of labour, patriarchal structure of the family, predominantly patrilocal forms of marriage, patrilineal kinship structure, labour market segregation, media etc. have played a crucial role (as was seen in the earlier units) in the discrimination and marginalisation of women in the society. In the earlier units of this block we discussed these aspects in length. In the following sections of this unit we shall be dealing with some of the important manifestations of marginalised status of women in India. Here we shall be concentrating on the economic, socio-cultural, health and political status of women.

4.3 WOMEN AND ECONOMY

Women play a crucial role in all sectors of the Indian economy. They are predominantly represented in the agricultural and unorganised sectors. They face specific problems in each sector of the economy. Besides these specific problems, they also face some general problems in work participation per se. Some of these problems may be highlighted here.

4.3.1 Non-recognition of Women's Work as Economic Activity

One of the sociological realities of women's work participation is that women carry the principal burden of household duties, including the biologically determined roles and responsibilities of reproduction. Herein regular activities like child bearing, child rearing, completion of household chores etc. are not considered to be "economic activities". Besides, many other (economic) activities are undertaken by women from within the four walls of the households such as storage, food processing etc. These also remain invisible and unrecognized. Because of their preoccupation with the household activities, they cannot fully devote themselves to the so-called economically viable activities. Here also because of their irregular nature of "work" participation, their work contribution remains mostly unrecognized. They, indeed, get only a marginal status in the labour market.

The census of India has defined "work" as participation in any economically productive activity. The 1991 census shows that at an all India level the percentage of workers (male + female) to the total population was 37.64%. Significantly the percentage for the male workers was 51.52% as against the female worker's 22.69%. Again of the total workers for the male 50.54% were "main" and 0.98% were marginal workers while for the female only 16.43% were the main and 6.26% were the marginal workers. The high incidence of marginal workers among the female working population is mostly because of non-recognition of work undertaken by women as economic activity and their irregular participation in the so-called economic activities. The census also counts as high as 77.31% of women of India as non-workers.

Table 1: Proportion of the Total Workers, Main Workers and Marginal Workers to the Total Population — 1991.

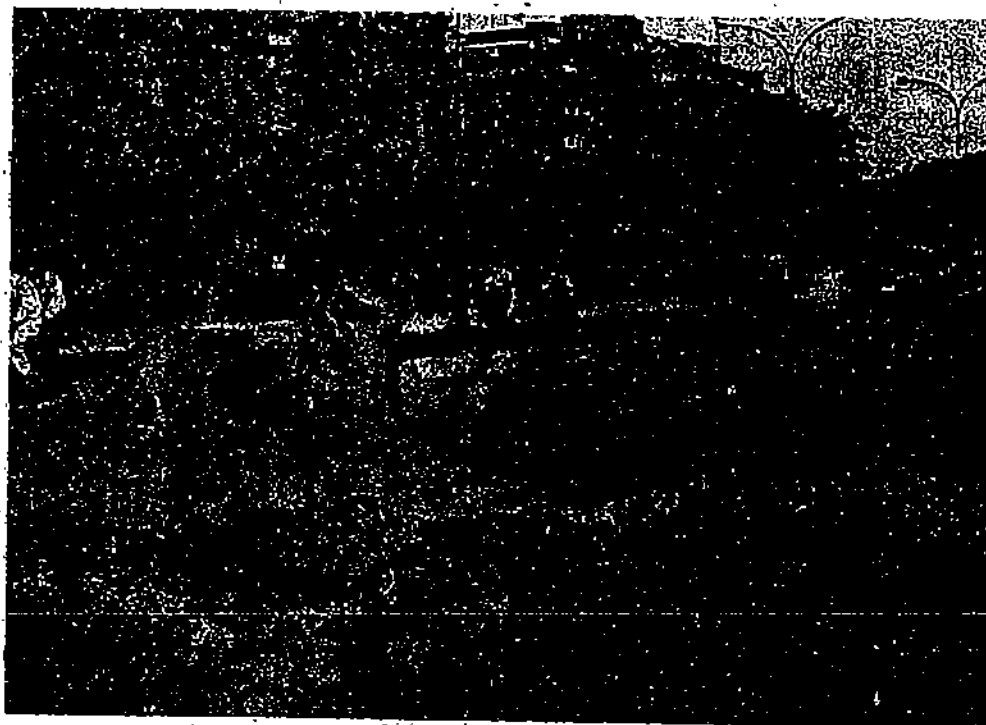
	Total Workers	Main Workers	Marginal Workers
Person	37.64	34.12	3.12
Male	51.52	50.54	0.98
Female	22.69	16.43	6.26

Source: Census of India, 1991.

4.3.2 Women in Agriculture and Unorganised Sector

Women engage in a wide variety of occupations especially in the unorganised sector both in the rural and urban. They care for cattle, sow, transplant, harvest, weave, work on handlooms and produce handicrafts mostly as low paid wage earners or as unpaid family workers in the rural areas. In the urban informal sector, they work as petty traders and producers, selling and producing a variety of goods, such as vegetables, fruits, flowers, cooked food, groceries etc. or work as domestic workers. A significant segment of them also work as construction workers.

According to an estimate of the National Commission on Self Employed Women 94% of the total female work force operates within the highly exploited sector. Their employment is characterized by low pay, long hours of work, low productivity, low skill and lack of job security. There are only a few trade unions to facilitate the mobilisation of women workers and knit them into a conscious workforce (NPPWD, 1988 : 7).



Women in unorganised sector : a burden to carry and children to look after.

Courtesy : Atul Yadav, New Delhi

According to a recent estimate, around 90% of women workforce in India are in the unorganised sector including agriculture. Female workforce in India is predominantly found in agriculture. Of the total female workforce (main workers) 78.11% are in agriculture, 4.63% in the household industry, and the remaining 17% are in the other industrial categories [viz. mining, quarrying, livestock, fishing, hunting, plantation, construction, trade, commerce, transportage communication etc. A majority of the women work in the agriculture as "agricultural labourers". Of the total women workers (78.11%) working in agriculture, 34.55% are cultivators while 43.56% are agricultural labourers.

The female agricultural labourers are absolutely from the lowest strata of the caste hierarchy i.e., from the Scheduled Caste and the Other Backward Classes and from the Scheduled Tribal

backgrounds. As you are aware, unspecified time schedules, low wages, gender based wage variations, seasonal nature of employment, lack of job certainty, traditional bondage and loyalty and indebtedness are some of the features of employment in the agriculture. They have to work from sunrise to sunset without a specified time schedule. They usually get half the wage of their male counterparts. In the agriculturally backward regions they never get employment throughout the year. They have to migrate seasonally in the lean seasons of employment. Many a time they are tied to land owners in a "beck and call relationship". They are mostly illiterates and remain politically fragmented except for some areas in our country. Ignorance, dependency, ill health and drudgery are the mode of their survival.

4.3.3 Problems of Employment of Rural Women

Women's employment has been recognized as the "critical entry point" for women's integration in the mainstream of development. The low and deteriorating status of rural women is attributed to their declining economic participation. It is now accepted that the participation of women themselves in development activities is the most effective method for the promotion of the access of women to the benefits of development.

The Sixth Five Year Plan accepted poor rural women as the targets of rural development strategies. However some of the problems identified concerning rural women were as follows :

- a) Marginality of attention and services to them in rural and agricultural development,
- b) Lack of training to develop their awareness and skills along with lack of information and bargaining power,
- c) Low productivity and narrow occupational choices,
- d) Low level of participation in decision making,
- e) Inadequate expert guidance about financial matters for promoting socio-economic activity of rural women and their participation,
- f) Inadequate monitoring of women's participation in different sectors,
- g) Wage discrimination,
- h) Inadequate application of science and technology to remove their drudgery, and
- i) Low health and nutrition status.

In agriculture and allied services, development strategies have provided very little attention to women in comparison to their active involvement in these sectors. Capital intensive agriculture and the green revolution have reduced women's participation in farm activities, but the work load related to homebased farm activities has increased considerably. This has only reduced them from a working to a non-working status (NPPWD, 1998:6).

It has also been observed that the limited employment opportunities created by technology resulting in the means of production being concentrated in the hands of a few, and increased landlessness for the poor has led to men replacing women in many of their traditional areas of employment. But women have had to work to survive. They are thus found to be gradually moving to the non-traditional sectors seeking employment for survival.

Do You Know?

Schemes for Rural Women

In India various schemes have been introduced for employment of rural women. We may mention here a few. The Integrated Rural Development Programme was introduced in 1979 and extended to all Development Blocks in the country in 1980-81. An exclusive scheme for the social and economic upliftment of women belonging to the families below the poverty line DW CRA (Development of Women and Children of Rural Areas) was launched in 1982 as a sub-component of IRDP. Women headed households were given priority in the Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) programme, a component of the IRDP. Again in the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) introduced in 1980, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) introduced in 1983, guidelines were issued for increasing participation of women in wage employment and creation of assets specific to the needs of women's groups. However, in spite of all these schemes, there has not been any substantial improvement in the status of women in the rural areas.

Problems of Construction Labour

A substantial number of women workers work in building and construction. Though they are employed on a casual basis, most of them have a long years of experience in this area of work. The use of contractors to mobilize labour for this sector has perpetuated the age old method of recruiting by "Credit tying" and loan bondage methods that are routinely used to mobilize migrant labour for various seasonal operation.

Usually they reach out to the work place after exchange of hands of various sub and sub-sub contractors. These contractors use various methods to make or keep the wage of the labourers very low (NPPWD, 1988:7).

4.3.4 Women in the Organised Sector

The SAARC Guide Book on Women in Development noted that the organized sector accounts for approximately 10% of the total female labour force in India. Women's work participation in the organized sector is affected by a variety of factors. Some of these factors may be noted here:

a) Low access to Education and Training

Women have got a very low access to formal education and training facilities. Traditional role expectations from women forbid the parents from sending their daughters up for higher education. Again in case of poverty or economic compulsion, parents first withdraw daughters from the education system as daughters are considered to be "paraya dhan". Similarly, they are also usually deprived of the opportunity of vocational training. Traditionally men are preferred wherever any option is available. Thus, they lag behind the men folk in the job market. Scholars pointed out that "pre-market gender discrimination" of these varieties adversely affect women's work participation in the job market.

b) Employers Negative Attitude Towards the Women Employees

Studies conducted in the several parts of the country show that employers have a negative attitude towards the women employees for several reason.

- i) The protective laws for women (e.g. maternity leave, social security etc. benefits). Employers consider these laws to be extra burdens. Once women workers are employed,

the employers have to incur extra cost to provide maternity leave, creche and other facilities for women. Hence, the employer usually prefers male workers. A recent study conducted in the Okhla Industrial Estate of New Delhi shows that to avoid protective laws, the employers of the electronic and the garment industries employ women mostly on a casual and contract basis. They employ mostly unmarried and young girls who do not require the benefits of the protective laws. It is necessary to mention here that the electronic and the garment industries need women workers in the assembly line and in knitting activities respectively for the specific qualities of women viz. dexterity of hands and patience to do monotonous work for longer hours.

ii) **Double Work Burden of Women.** Many employers consider women workers to be non-committed to their working environment since women also have to perform various reproductive and household duties. Even where women are employed, they are kept in the unskilled low paid job. At the time of promotion women are usually not preferred.

c) Poor Working Conditions

Many a time poor working conditions, lack of transport facility, long distance from home, lack of personal facilities for women etc. discourage women from taking jobs in the industrial sector. Besides, the fear of exploitation, sexual harassment, ignorance about their legal rights etc. play a decisive role in their non-participation. There is always a concern about their physical safety.

d) Gendered Role Expectations and Self Image of Women

Women in India are socialised to perform gendered roles. They are socialised to be homely and good housewives. They are socialised to internalize the culture of home makers. Once women internalise this dominant home maker role, they are likely to adopt a non-competitive, uninvolved and low profile at work. "She is committed to the value system which stresses that her energies and motivations are to be directed to making a success of her home and not her job." Interestingly this is true of women in highly skilled occupations as well. In her study of women scientists, Maithreyi Krishnaraj (1978) found that though women were concerned about remaining in their jobs they were not looking better prospects nor had they begun with a long rang career strategy (cf. IGNOU, 1992).

Learn from Your Experience 1

You may be observing several women working in the organised sector. Interview at least five women of this category and try to know from them what are the major problems they face in performing their duties.

4.4 WOMEN AND EDUCATION

With the recognition of the need to direct the process of social change and development towards certain desired goals, education has come to be increasingly regarded as a major instrument of social change (CSWI, 1974:734). Now it is recognised that "developmental goals and progress of literacy are interdependent and a modern society based on science and technology requires a corresponding increase in the educational base of the country" (SAARC Guide Book on WID, 1986: 287).

4.4.1 Educational Status of Women

The Indian constitution provides equality of opportunity to all citizens irrespective of race, sex, caste and religion. It has also empowered the state to make specified provisions for the educational well being of women and other weaker sections of the society. However, in spite of the various commendable provisions available in the constitution and various initiatives undertaken by the state (howsoever serious may it be) even after the 50 years of our independence a vast segment of the female population in India remains illiterate. Though the percentage of literacy has increased among women in India over the years from 15.34% in 1961 to 39.42% in 1991, the absolute number of illiterate female population has made a quantum jump in the same period. There are several factors working against the educational well being of women in India. Some of the important factors may be highlighted here.

Literacy Rate of Women in India (1961-1991)

Year	Literacy Rate			
	Women	Decadal Difference	Total Male + Female	Decadal Difference
1961	15.34	—	28.31	—
1971	21.97	+ 6.63	34.45	+ 6.14
1981	29.75	+ 7.78	43.56	+ 9.11
1991	39.42	+ 9.69	52.11	+ 9.55

Note : For 1961 & 1971 literacy rate is for 5+ years and population
For 1981 & 1991 literacy rate is for 7+ years and population

Source: Census of India - 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991

4.4.2 Factors Adversely Affecting Women's Education

There are several factors adversely affecting women's educational status. Let us examine some of them.

- a) The socio-cultural factors like early marriage, purdah, traditional gender role expectations etc. come in conflict with the ideals of education of women. Even though the Child Marriage Act has been amended to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls at 18 years and that of 21 years for the boys, child marriage is quite rampant in various rural areas of the country. Child marriage not only causes drop out of the girls from school immediately, it also causes various other social problems like early pregnancy, ill-health, perpetuation of illiteracy, ignorance, conservatism, poverty and so on. Similarly the purdah system not only adversely affects the enrolment of girls in school and their improvement, but it also contributes towards the creation and internalization of a low self image among them. The gender role expectation that visualises girls as passive home makers goes against the ideals of active participation in decision making processes. Here the traditional normative arrangements of the society, its values, beliefs, culture, institutions and the process of socialisation act as barriers for the girls enrolment and retention in the schools.

Do You Know? 2

- On the occasion of "Akha Teej" ceremony in Rajasthan over 50,000 children are married every year. Many of these children are mere babies.
- A recent study shows that in the Sivakasi match industry of the 45,000 working children 90% are girls of below 14 years age. All these girls are deprived of their education.

- b) The structural elements of education viz. non-availability of sufficient number of schools, rigidity of school timings, rigid admission rules, insufficient number of women teachers, absence of girl's school etc. act as severe barriers against women's education in India.
- c) Gender bias in text books and also among the teachers also causes enormous damage to women's education. Conventional text books invariably project women as dependent and inferior. It reinforces the conventional familial attitudes towards the girls. In many cases the teachers are also not gender sensitive.

Think It Over 1

What are the socio-cultural factors negatively influencing the state of women's education in India?

4.5 WOMEN AND HEALTH

In India, within the given socio-cultural matrix, women get a very low access to medical care. Some factors like levels of earnings of the family, its educational background, attitude to marriage, value attached to the fertility of women and sex of the child, and the ideal role demanded of women by social conventions affect the women's health adversely. In the following section we shall be discussing some of the related issues of women's health.

4.5.1 Female Sex Ratio and Life Expectancy

Though the absolute number of female population has increased in India over the years, female sex ratio has steadily declined over the years. In 1901 there were 972 females to per 1000 males while this number has declined to 930 in 1971 and again to 928 in 1991. Neglect of the girl child at the early stage leading to a high rate of female infant mortality rate, death during child birth, female infanticide, and foetus killing etc. largely contribute to the declining female sex ratio in India.

In India life expectancy has increased for both the sexes. In 1921 life expectancy for both the sexes was 26 years. In 1994 the life expectancy for the male and female has become 61.4 and 61.1 years respectively.

Table: Age Specific Death Rates in India 1988

Age	Male	Female	Total
0-4 years	31.8	34.9	33.3
5-14	2.2	2.5	2.4
15-34	2.3	3.0	2.6
35-49	6.4	4.6	5.5
50 +	36.6	31.1	33.9

Source : EPW Research Foundation, 1994 : 1229

The gender based age specific death rate shows that women's death rate has always been higher than the males in all age groups except for the age group of 50 years +. Indeed the higher female infant mortality rate has been a prime cause for the declining female sex ratio in India.

4.5.2 Early Marriage and Women's Health

In 1981, 7% of the girls in the age group of 10-14 and 43% in the age group of 15-19 years were married. Thus, 50% of the girls were introduced to the reproduction process at teenage. Because of malnutrition, over burden of work, illiteracy, ignorance of sex behaviour, these pregnant girls have a higher risk of life. In India, around 10-15% of the annual births is from these adolescent mothers, who suffer from underweight and risk of mortality.

In India, women have an average 8 to 9 pregnancies. Study shows that in low income group pregnant women have a deficiency of 1,100 calories and lactating mothers around 1000 calories. They gain only 3 to 5 kgs. of weight during pregnancy which is far less than the required weight. Anemia in pregnancy account directly for 15 to 20% of all maternal deaths. The maternal mortality is 400 to 500 per 1,00,000 births. However, this figure is as high as 1,000 to 1,200 in some rural areas. Again more than 29% deliveries in the urban areas and 71% in the rural areas take place without trained personal (NPPWD, 1988:).

This problem should be viewed from the point of view that early marriage and a large number of pregnancies act as severe blockage for women's educational and economic well being. The events stop the process of their social and economic empowerment in the long run.

4.6 WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

India is the largest democracy of the world. This provides equal opportunity of political participation to its citizens through the institution of adult franchise. However, there are various other means of political participation. At this stage you may be interested to know the meaning of political participation and what does it mean for women ?

4.6.1 Political Participation : Meaning and Dimensions

The concept of political participation is closely related to the issue of exercise of power. Here the exercise of power may either be for the maintenance of the existing status-quo to protect the interest(s) (may be social, economic, cultural, political etc.) of a particular group in society, or for the reversal of the existing situation in favour of another group. Here exercise of power may mean effectively influencing the decision making processes. Participation in adult franchise or participation in the decision making processes of the formal bodies of the state (executive, legislative or judiciary) are only a few of the various ways of effectively participating in the decision making processes' what we shall be calling "political participation". Closely related to the concept of political participation is political status. "The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women". Gandhiji's realisation was that the legal and political power for women were to be the starting points to enable society to transform itself by ending all exploitation, a process in which women would be the prime movers (CSWI, 1974 : 284).

4.6.2 Overview of Political Participation

As discussed earlier, there are various facets of political participation. Here, we shall be discussing some of these facets.

a) **Women's participation in the Freedom Struggle**

One of the unique features of freedom struggle of India is that it witnessed large scale participation of women from all walks of life—educated and not so educated, upper and middle class women, peasant women, working class women and so on. Even women who spent their lives behind purdah came out to fight orthodoxy and communal separation. Social legitimisation of such activity was not forthcoming at first but women joined men to fight in the national movement. Events proved that without the cooperation of women the freedom struggle would not have been so successful (CSWI, 1974 : 284-5).

Women participated in the freedom struggle in different ways. They participated in the political protests, picketed shops selling foreign goods, provided food and shelter to underground activists, carried messages to activists and gave encouragement to them as well. In the partition of Bengal Movement 1905, Bengal witnessed the spontaneous and aggressive activity of women. In 1920 women in large numbers participated in "Swadeshi", in 1930 in the Salt-March, and in 1942 in the Quit India Movement. Women also participated in other types of activities. Mrs. Annie Besant's Home Rule Movement and her advocacy of women's rights inspired many women who realised their lack of access to political space. In the north Sarojini Naidu, Radha Bai, Rameswari Naidu and Bee Animan among others, emerged in the forefront of fighting for nationalism, self-government and women's rights. Women also supported and backed the militant revolutionary movement in Bengal, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Bhikaji Cama, Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, Kalpana Dutta and Kamala Dasgupta (Bengal), Sushila Devi and Durga Devi (Punjab), Roopavati Jain (Delhi), Laxmi Devi Sehgal (Women's Regiment of the Indian National Army) and many others were involved in the revolutionary activities. Thus, women as a whole shared the passion for freedom, added to its meaning, and contributed equally to the attainment of freedom of India.

Do You Know? 3

Mahatma Gandhiji's View on Women's Role in Social Revolution and Reconstruction

"Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have."

"Since resistance (satyagraha) is offered through self-suffering, it is a weapon pre-eminently open to women. She can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith."

Source: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974

b) **Electoral Participation**

Independent India has witnessed impressive participation of women in the election and in related activities. Some of the important trends of women participation in electoral politics may be summarised below :

- i) The nature and extent of their participation is much greater than in many other developed and developing countries.

- ii) This participation is steadily increasing over the years.
- iii) The gap in the turn-out between men and women is getting much narrower.
- iv) The percentage of female turn out has been maximum in recent years. It shows that women are getting more politicised and becoming more and more politically aware.
- v) The number of women getting elected to the representative bodies is also steadily increasing.
- vi) The electoral participation of women is being affected by the following trends :
 - a) Despite the increase in the number of women contesting the elections, they still constitute only a tiny minority in the elected bodies. However, the 73rd Amendment has brought some change to this scenario as it has provided compulsory 33% representation of women in local elected bodies.
 - b) Many women contest as independent candidates which implies that political parties are reluctant to field women candidates. (The proposed 81st Amendment in the Indian Constitution will bring a change in the situation as it speaks for 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.
 - c) The small number of women who contest, get their candidature by their birth in political families and close relationship with already established party leaders.
 - d) Only a few women contestants can claim to have risen from or worked with the working class (SAARC Guide Book on WID, 1988: 316-31).

c) Judiciary and Administration

It is significant that out of the bulk of women students who take law courses, only a few pursue



One of the few but making a mark in public space.

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

a legal career. It is only recently that women have started opting for this career. A few women have also been appointed as the Judges in the High Courts of Kerala, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and in the Supreme Court of India.

Though India had a distinguished women Prime Minister, and several women ministers (both at the levels of Cabinet and State) their relative number have been very few and far between. Shri Deva Gowda Ministry had only one woman Minister. To give a human face to his ministry Shri I.K. Gujral P.M. inducted four women Ministers to his administration in 1987. The number of women Secretaries in various ministries is also very low. According to an estimate only 10% of these administrators, 5.8% of the IAS Officers and only around one percent of the IPS Officers are women. Only 6 out of 150 Universities had women Vice-Chancellors including 4 women Vice Chancellors for the women's universities in India in 1988 (SAARC Guide Book on WID, 1988: 322).

d) Women's Participation in the Panchayati Raj

In 1952 the Community Development and Panchayati Raj was inaugurated "seeking to harness people's power and channelise their participation for social construction". Following the Report of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee 1957, the Panchayati Raj was born in 1959 first in Rajasthan and subsequently in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra and later on introduced in the other constituent states of India.

The issue of women's participation in the Panchayati Raj has assumed a crucial significance in recent years especially in the context of (a) the phenomenal visibility of women in the localized decision making processes and (b) the 72nd and the 73rd Amendment of Indian Constitution that provides the Panchayati Raj institutions a statutory status and ensures one third reservation of the seats at all the three levels (Village, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad) for the women candidates. There are now as many as 80,00,000 elected women's representatives in the Panchayati Raj institutions in India who participate in all levels of the decision making of the affairs of the Panchayat. However, women's entry into the village level politics has not been a smooth affair at all. In many parts of the country they are still struggling for their independent political identity.

e) Women in the Peasant Movement

Peasant movements have always been the harbingers of new identity for the exploited peasantry since these have challenged the base of legitimacy of the pre-existing power structure. In all the radical peasant movements (viz. Tebhaga 1946, Telengana (1946-52), Naxalbari (1967-69) etc. women have played key roles in maintaining the communication network, giving shelter to the underground activists, maintaining the alarm system, standing in the forefront of the battle, and fighting against the landlord and the state apparatus combine. In many places they adopted armed struggle and guerilla tactics and played leadership roles. The radical movement gave them enormous space to demolish the age-old structure of subordination.

In recent years mobilisation of the peasantry has been mostly institutionalized in nature. They participate in the localized mobilization on various localized issues viz., of minimum wage, equal pay for equal work, distribution of surplus vested lands etc. Hence, their participation is mostly sporadic and segmented. However, as the women's movement is spreading even into remote areas, working class women of rural India are becoming more and more aware of their rights and exploitation.

What do you mean by political participation of all citizens or mass political participation by Indian women. Give one clear example.

4.6 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER ISSUES IN INDIA

The Report on Human Development in South Asia 1997 writes:

“A region once justly proud of its rich heritage of Indus Valley Civilization, South Asia now enjoys the dubious distinction of lagging behind all other regions of the world in human development. It is now the most illiterate region of the world..... the poorest region on the face of this planet..... The extent of human deprivation is colossal”.

It writes regarding gender disparities: “while growing up in South Asia is a perpetual struggle, to be women in this region is to be a non-person. Women bear the greatest burden of human deprivation in South Asia..... there has been very limited investment in improving the basic capabilities of women and enabling them to take full advantage of the opportunities of life”.

4.6.1 Gender Disparities: A Comparison

On the Human Development Index, India ranks as low as 135 out of 174 nations. “Women and children bear the brunt of human deprivation in India. About 62 million children under the age of 5 years are malnourished. As many as 88% of the pregnant women aged 15-49 suffer from anemia. Over two thirds of the female adult population is illiterate.”

Gender Disparities in India			
	Year	100	Parity Female/Male
Life Expectancy	1993	100	61/61
Adult Literacy	1993	56	36/64
Labour Force	1993	47	32/68
Earned Income Share	1992	33	25/75
Economic Activity Rate	1994	34	22/82
Administrators and Managers	1992	2	2/98
Share in Parliament	1996	8	7/93

Source: Human Development in South Asia, 1997.

A comparative picture on the gender related development index of India is given below:

Table: Gender—Related Development Index of the SAARC and Few Developed Countries 1994

Human Development	Country	Life Expectancy		Adult Literacy		Gross Enrolment		Earned Income Share	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
91	Sri Lanka	74.6	70.0	86.9	93.2	68.0	65.0	34.5	65.5
111	Maldives	61.5	64.2	92.9	93.1	70.0	70.0	35.4	64.6
138	India	61.4	61.1	36.1	64.5	47.0	63.0	25.7	74.3
139	Pakistan	63.3	61.1	23.3	49.0	25.0	50.0	20.8	79.2
144	Bangladesh	56.5	56.3	24.3	48.4	34.0	45.0	23.1	76.9
154	Nepal	54.9	55.8	12.8	39.7	42.0	68.0	33.0	67.0
155	Bhutan	53.2	49.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	Canada	81.7	76.3	99.0	99.0	100.0	100.0	37.8	62.2
Industrial Countries		77.8	70.2	98.5	98.5	83.9	81.5	37.7	62.4
World Average		65.4	61.8	170.8	83.5	57.1	63.9	33.3	66.9

Source: Human Development Report, 1997.

Among the SAARC Countries India occupies only the third position so far as the Human Development Index is concerned. Indian women have a lower rate of life expectancy than their counterparts in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Maldives; and a higher life expectancy than the women of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Obviously, Indian women have a lower life expectancy than the women of the developed and the industrial countries.

So far as the adult literacy rates, and gross enrolment (total of primary, secondary and tertiary education) are concerned, Indian women lag behind not only their male counterparts, but also behind the female counterparts in Sri Lanka, Maldives within SAARC Countries, and obviously the women of the developed and industrial countries. Similarly, they also get a lower share of the earned income than their men-folk in the country. This share (25.7%) is significantly lower than the women's share of earned income in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal. Needless to say, though there are gender disparities, women of the developed and industrial countries get a higher share of the earned income than the women of India.

4.6.2 Gender Empowerment: A Comparison

Among 174 nations, India occupies the 86th rank so far as the "Gender Empowerment Rank" is concerned. Indeed, it is far below the rank occupied by Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. However, in India 7.3% of the parliamentarians are women, which is higher than women's representation in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan, but lower than Bangladesh.

Among the SAARC Countries Indian women have the least representation in the administration and management services. They represent only 2.3 of the total administrators and managers of India and only 20.5% of the professional and the technical workers. The gender empowerment measurement rank of India is far behind the world average. The table below highlights the comparative picture.

Table: Gender Empowerment Measures in SAARC Countries and Few Developed Countries

Human Development Index Rank	Country	Gender Empowerment Measure Rank	Seats in Parliament (% of Women)	Administrators/Managers (% of Women)	Professional Technical Workers (% of Women)	Earned Income Share (% of Women)
91	Sri Lanka	70	5.3	16.9	24.5	34.0
111	Maldives	67	6.3	14.0	34.6	35.0
138	India	86	7.3	2.3	20.5	26.0
139	Pakistan	92	3.4	3.4	20.1	21.0
144	Bangladesh	76	9.1	5.1	23.1	23.0
154	Nepal	—	—	—	—	—
155	Bhutan	—	—	—	—	—
Industrial Countries		—	13.6	27.4	47.8	40.0
World		—	12.9	14.1	39.3	30.0
3	Norway	1	39.4	30.9	57.5	42.0

Source: Human Development Report, 1997.

4.6.3 Gender Disparity and Poverty: Priorities for Action

The lower Human Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure Rank, and Gender Related Development Index for India are associated with the existence of poverty. There are higher rates of gender disparities in income distribution, health facilities, educational attainment, representation in decision making bodies, and also in the administration and management services among the economically poor countries. Poverty brings not only mere hardship for women but also squeezes opportunities and life options for them. It accentuates the gender gap and affects women more adversely than men. It ultimately takes the shape of feminization of poverty. The Human Development Report 1997 has suggested six important priorities for action. Significantly the first two actions are related to gender :

- a) "Every where the starting point to empower women and men is to ensure their participation in decisions that affect their lives and enable them to build their strengths and assets."
- b) Gender equality is essential for empowering women and for eradicating poverty.

The Report says, this means;

- "Focussing clearly on ending discrimination against girls in all aspects of health, education and upbringing—starting with survival.
- Empowering women by ensuring equal rights and access to land, credit and job opportunities.
- Taking more action to end violence against women.....
- A creative commitment to gender equality which strengthen every area of action to reduce poverty—because women can bring new energy, new insight and a new basis of organization.

The report clearly mentions "If development is not engendered, it is endangered, and if poverty reduction strategies fail to empower women, they will fail to empower society" (7).

4.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This unit has tried to give you an overview of the status of women in India. This unit began with problems of generalisation on the issues of status of women in India and highlighted the commonalities on this issue. Economy contributes a lot in determining the status of an individual or group in the society. We discussed the nature and extent of women's economic contribution in the society in greater details. This section was followed by educational status of women in the society. The various factors affecting women's educational status are also discussed here. We have also discussed the issues of health and political status of women in this unit. Lastly we have discussed the issue of human development and gender disparities in India in a broad context. Indeed, this unit gives you a background for further discussion on the problems and prospects of women's empowerment in India.

4.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Gender empowerment measures :** This indicates whether women are able to actively participate in economic and political life. It focusses on participation, measuring gender inequality in the key areas of economic and political participation and decision making (Human Development Report, 1997:14).
- Gender Related Development Index :** (GDI) takes into account of inequality between men and women in achievement in a country in three basic dimensions of human development—longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living. The greater the disparity in basic human development, the lower a country's GDI compared with its human development index. (Human Development Report 1997:14).
- The Human Development Index :** (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country in the three basic dimensions of human development. A composite index, the HDI contains three variables—life expectancy, educational attainment (adult literacy and combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment and real GDP per capita (Human Development Report 1997: 14)

4.9 SOME USEFUL READINGS

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उत्तर प्रदेश
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CWED -01

**Foundation Course in
Women's Empowerment
and Development**

Block

2

STRUGGLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION : STRUGGLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

This Block discusses the various forms of struggles for gender equality in India. It is significant that all struggles for gender equality have not been manifested or visible in nature. Again many of the struggles have not been specifically focused on gender issues. What are these struggles? What for these struggles are? There are several such questions discussed in this block. Struggles have always been against various forms of subordination and suppression. All subordination, is deeply rooted in the 'power relations of the society. Hence struggle is a vehicle for political participation. As empowerment is a process of gaining control over power, struggles contribute to this process as a means of political participation. However, conventional view on political participation has been very narrow in nature. Since every relation is having a power dynamics inbuilt in it, there is an immediate need to redefine the scope of political participation.

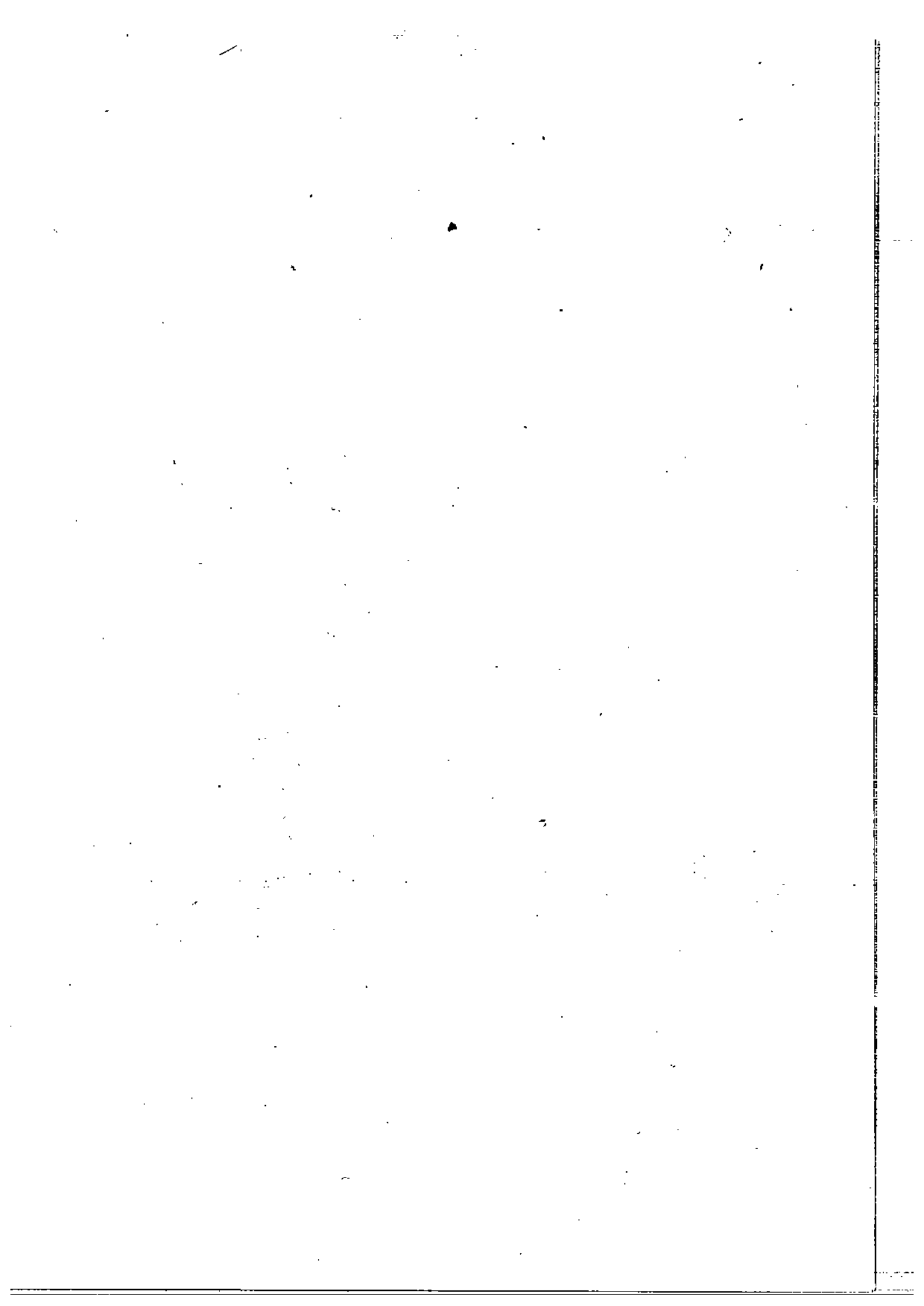
Unit 5 is on **Participation in the Political Processes?** It explains the meanings, dimensions and the feminist perspective on political participation. It also presents an overview of the formal political participation of women as reflected in adult franchise, etc. Throughout history women have participated in various social movements. We have discussed the concepts of and relationships between social movements and women's empowerment at length in this unit.

Unit 6 provides a **New Look at History**. It deals with some of the problems of the conventional history. It depicts the broad social context in which changes were taking place in pre-independent India along with the emergence of middle class and manifestation of reform movements. The early attempts of social reform focusing on women's issues, women's education etc. are discussed there. Women's participation in the nationalist struggles are also discussed in that historical context. This unit suggests for a recasting of history in view of new facts and perspectives on the gender issue.

Unit 7 deals with **Women's Movements in Independent India**. It explains the socio-political scenario of post independent India and analyses the basis of emergence and forms of participation of women in various rural movements viz. the Srikakulam movement, **Bodhgaya** land struggle and Chipko movement. A glimpse of women's movement in urban India is also presented here. Here we discussed the urban based movements on violence against women, dowry and dowry deaths, mis-representation of women in media and the right to health.

Women's Movements in South Asia are discussed in unit no.8. This unit presents an overview of the socio-economic status of women in South Asia and some of the common issues of women's movements in these countries. It covers specifically the form and directions of contemporary women's movement of Nepal, Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Some of the issue based women's movements of these countries are selectively discussed here.

Unit 9 deals with the **Global Debates on Gender Equality**. Since Women's movements in India have been a part of global awakening of women, it is imperative for us to present a glimpse of the global view on gender equality. Various proceedings of the United Nations sponsored conferences and initiatives are discussed in this unit. The specific recommendations of the Nairobi and the Beijing conferences, the NGO and the Government perspectives in these conferences are examined. The issue of the girl child forms an inseparable part of the women's issue both at the global and national level. The initiatives formulated and executed at the global, SAARC and national levels are also examined here. We have discussed these debates at great length again in unit 2 of WED 2.



UNIT 5 PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESSES?

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5.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In the previous block of this course we have discussed the various dimensions of social construction of gender. We have specifically discussed the material, institutional and ideological basis of gender construction. We have also discussed the social, economic and political position of women in contemporary India. In the last unit of that block we have briefly discussed, along with other things, the various facets of political participation of women in India. This unit is an extension of our previous discussion and this discussion will be carried out at length in the following units of this block. Indeed, this unit should be considered only as a preamble of this block. Here after reading this unit you should be able to :

- Explain the meanings and dimensions of political participation,
- Describe various formal initiatives for women's political participation,
- Analyse the similarity between participation in the political process and participation in the social movements, and
- Explain the relationship between social movements and women's empowerment.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Conventionally political participation is understood in terms of exercise of power of the state, and participation in the formal institutions of the state for the exercise of power. However this notion has proved to be inadequate as it is unable to accommodate the various other forms of political participation. Many groups may exercise power even without being parts in the formal institutions of the state. Here this unit begins with a discussion on the meanings and dimensions of political

participation. It also discusses the feminist perspective on political participation. As women's political participation has various dimensions and most of these will be covered in the following units of this block, in this unit we have briefly focused the early phase of attention on women's issues, women's participation in the nationalist movement and the politics of adult franchise. The significant issue of reservation of women in electoral representation has also been discussed in this unit.

Participation in social movements is a unique form of political participation. Why do women from marginalised groups participate in a large scale in radical social movements? Do radical peasant movements provide the required space for women's empowerment in society? We have also discussed these issues in this unit after discussing the relationships between political participation, social movements and empowerment of women, the form and extent of women's participation in radical and reformist movements.

5.2 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: MEANINGS AND DIMENSIONS

Before we describe the efforts of ensuring participation of women in political processes it would be useful to understand what is political participation and what is the feminist understanding of political participation?

5.2.1 Politics and Political Participation

For a long time theorists have held that politics is about representation, policy, position and power with government as the only arena of political activity. This is defined as any activity which aims at bringing government to work in a particular direction to secure particular results. Thus politics is mainly concerned with activities related to governing the nation. However, the definition of politics which is accepted now is much wider covering not merely the formal area of government but also informal processes of bringing about change in society. Thus politics includes all areas directly and indirectly associated with the governance of the country and in which every citizen has a share. The concept of politics has thus evolved into a much wider one in terms of spheres, objectives, and activities. The theorists now include movements, protests and struggles as legitimate expressions of political behaviour and examine the forces which lead people to protest.

Thus political participation includes not merely electoral politics and activities of the political parties but also social and political movements i.e. participation of women in various struggles and protests. The other very significant implication of change in the definition of political processes is the deepening of the definition of political spheres. The political sphere includes, 'the spheres in social relations where power relations are generated, institutionalised and used to encourage and control the distribution of resources. The widened definition has been drawn at the instance of UNESCO and is supported by non-aligned groups. Political issues now include every kind of issue of power relations, including those of family and everyday life, of survival itself. Collective actions by the subalterns to challenge the hegemony of the power holders are integral parts of the political process. Women have participated in various local and national confrontations with the government and this activity is now included in political participation. Therefore, on the one hand political participation is a process that denotes a series of voluntary activities having a bearing on political processes such as voting, membership of and activities in support of political groups, personal communication with elected members, dissemination of political opinions to the community. On the other hand, political participation refers to 'acts by those not formally empowered to make decisions — the acts being intended to influence the behaviour of those who have such decision making power (Desai, N. and U. Takhar., 1990:3).

Do You Know? 1

Development Politics

An important aspect of politics of power is the decisions made with regard to the direction, priorities and allocation of resources in the development of the country. Though in a democracy these decisions have to be made through discussions, it is a well known fact that these decisions are arrived on the basis of power relations as well as ideological rationales at both the national and international levels. Thus we have a phenomenon called development politics.

5.2.2 Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective on political processes adds another dimension to the definition of politics. It highlights that there is an artificial dichotomy between the public sphere and the private sphere. If politics is seen as the instrument of power by means of which the power holders control the powerless, in a patriarchal society women have hardly any power in the private or the public sphere. Thus for women protesting or articulating their needs or problems becomes a political activity whether within the household or outside; consequently feminists have quite often used the phrase 'personal is political'. The private sphere of the family is now seen to be linked with, and dependent on the public.

In short in the new concept of political processes as well as of political participation, the connotation is not restricted to participation in formal electoral politics but includes other measures which have a significant influence in changing power relations. An eminent political science scholar, Moron Wiener, points out that the concept of political participation refers to any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organised or unorganised, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national. This widening of definition and the inclusion of a feminist perspective on power relations remarkably affects the nature of political activity. The struggle to change relationships of inequality within the family are also seen to be political, especially since the family at many levels is a microcosm of wider social relations and is not independent from them.

Think Over 1

What do you mean by political participation? How is it different from the popular perspective on political participation?

5.3 FORMAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW

Having discussed the parameters of political activity, in this section we will delineate the political participation of women in the formal structure.

5.3.1 Early Phase

When the women's question was first raised in the nineteenth century by reformers the focus was on removal of some of the social obstacles binding women's freedom as persons. However, for all the various measures adopted for raising the status of women, the reformers were not keen to include the rights of women in the areas of political or economic participation. The reformers

did not question the prevailing definitions of gender roles nor envisage the possibility of extending women's roles beyond the confines of the family. For a long time there has been separation of social space between the private and public spheres. There was a growing demand from the newly established political organization, the Indian National Congress, for a share in shaping Indian society. The founding fathers, however, were not even thinking of including women in their political agenda. Though there is enough evidence to suggest that women were attending the annual gatherings of the Congress, their specific role in the political processes had to wait till the late twenties when women participated in the national movement under the leadership of Gandhiji.

5.3.2 Women in Nationalist Politics

The demand for women's enfranchisement and right to hold public offices arose as a natural corollary of their participation in nationalist politics. During the formulation of measures of political participation to be adopted in respect of Indian people in 1918, women leaders like Sarojini Naidu demanded that the term Indian people should include Indian women also. Though women got the right to vote yet it was restricted by the twin requirements of education and the holding of property. The premier women's organization, All India Women's Conference, protested against this limited right and reiterated the demand for universal franchise, a demand which was incorporated in the Congress resolution of 1931. With the enshrining of gender equality in the Indian Constitution, the dream of equal right to political participation was realised. In the first election many women contested both at the state and national levels. Twenty two women got elected to the Lok Sabha and quite a few were given ministerial positions or were appointed as ambassadors or governors. Women's participation during voting was marked with enthusiasm.

5.3.3 Political Participation Through Adult Franchise

However, the achievement of the voting right proved illusory since with every election women as voters continued to grow but their share in the political power structure declined. Not only was the number of women contestants declining but the ruling political party gave women very little space at the ministerial level. This state of affairs continued into the 1990s and even in recent elections. Thus no appreciable change is being noticed. Despite lofty rhetorics no political party in power has included more than three or four women in the cabinet and that too at the rank of ministers. As mentioned in the country paper prepared for the Beijing Conference of 1995: "The number of women contestants in parliamentary elections has not increased significantly over the years. Political parties are still reluctant to field women candidates. The high cost of election campaigning is a deterrent for women candidates. Besides these factors, the growing corruption in the elections, criminalization of politics, complete lack of accountability of the elected representatives, and the vulnerability of women being looked upon as sex objects leading to intimidation, particularly of those who belong to the scheduled caste groups, have also proved to be deterrent factors.

As mentioned by Susheela Kaushik, 'the factors that may discourage the women are often the same which bring blemishes to the nature of Indian democratic practices and the electoral practices'. Among these are included the use of violence, the practice of booth capturing and wasteful expenditure by way of campaigning etc. (1995 : 83).

It is in this context that one has to understand the introduction of the policy of reservation. The women's movement from the beginning i.e. from the pre-independence period of the franchise movement had been demanding gender equality and not gender preference. Further with the equality enshrined in the Constitution it was felt that there was no need for preferential treatment. With the growth of women's movements in the seventies the consciousness about gender subordination

was increasing. The earlier feminist groups, came largely from a left political background, were not very keen to enter electoral politics. Hence they did not make any strong demand for incorporating women into the formal political process. There was a constant danger that by entering an intrinsically hierarchical structure women would lose the original vision of the women's movement. Shah and Gandhi write: 'Can we gauge the material and ideological efficacy and strengths which the movement might derive from women seizing positions of power? Should women's organizations actively encourage women to enter the formal political processes? Most women politicians will get trapped between party requirements and its marginalisation of women's issues and women's groups and objectives of the movement' (1997 : 17-18).

However, with the growing awareness of the marginalization of women activists in the political party structure, the need for adequate representation in the party was strongly realised. After mid-eighties, the Far Left too entered electoral politics, issues of fielding women candidates and of adequate representation were being raised. Thus women's groups which were not very assertive about women's participation in politics began to raise these questions in their groups. Two other reasons for change in the stance about a reservation policy were (a) the disturbing socio economic transformation that was going on as a result of liberalization policy, and (b) growing communal politics with its negative impact on women. The Shah Bano case, the Roop Kanwar case and the demolition of the Babri Masjid brought women's groups into confrontation with the state for its patriarchal and communal stances. The need for assertion within the political structure has been seriously felt. The significance of visibility through numbers is being realised because some of the policy measures are basically going against women. Thus some sections among the feminist groups are now striving to get into the political structures. Further feminists also realise that mere number or presence of women may not mean that women's needs will be taken care of. Increasingly the movement is seeking to make party candidates responsive to the promises given.

In the 1991 election and various other state elections efforts were made to get the political parties to spell out their political agenda in terms of women's needs. For instance, as a strategy of intervention seven all-India women's organizations undertook a door to door campaign to sensitise women voters on the need to choose candidates based on this agenda. These attempts during the 1996 elections culminated in the formulation of a Women's Manifesto and Charter of Demands by the National Alliance of Women after a series of meetings at the grass root level organised by the network of regional groups. The Manifesto provides a definition from a women's perspective and expresses their concern over the current trends in economic liberalization and communal politics. Apart from the demand for the restructuring of society on the principles of justice and equity, the Manifesto calls for political will to stem the tide of violence against women. In order to ensure that the elected candidates continue to abide by the promises they have made and also represent women's interests, the idea to start a Women's Party was mooted. This idea stems from similar experiments undertaken in Scandinavian countries and in Germany.

Thus by negotiating for more space in political processes, the women's movement has moved from acting as pressure group to influence policies and programmes to becoming actively involved in decision making. This came from the realisation that it was not enough to seek gender-just laws and identify the lacunae in the existing judicial system, but it was also important to forestall any policy that discriminated against human interests. With the growing awareness of women's role in political processes and the importance of the visibility of women in the political system, women of various parties have started to raise their voices against tokenism by party bosses; this was revealed recently when four women, who were inducted in the Shri I.K. Gujral ministry but not given cabinet rank and entrusted 'softer' portfolios, registered their protest.

5.3.4 Adult Franchise and Policy of Reservation

With the introduction of 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, the Act of the Panchayati Raj has also been introduced in 1994. The act provides for a three-tier structure of local self government in states with a population of not less than 2,000,000. This system comprises of a Village panchayat, a Panchayat Samiti and a Zilla Parishad. The Act ensures periodical elections of the members mainly through direct election. The most radical feature of the Act is that it has reserved 33 per cent for women. The policy of reservation of seats for women is not time bound nor are the women debarred from seeking elections to the unreserved seats. It has been estimated that thus about 800,000 seats at the village level, 17,000 seats at the intermediary level and 1583 seats at the district level will be reserved for women.

Initial findings of the scholars as well as activists were lukewarm about the efficacy of the functioning of women elected in the Panchayats. There were reports that many of them being illiterate were under the thumb of the male members. Quite often husbands were taking decisions through their wives. Studies have also shown that intimidation was experienced by scheduled caste women at the hands of upper caste men. However, in the gender training camps experiences were revealed which expressed the empowerment of women in this experiment. Not only are women resisting the directions given to them behind the curtain by their husbands or other male members but they are taking up issues such as water management, fuel, safe roads etc. and are slowly linking the private and the public forms of oppression. In a way participation at the Panchayat level has given rural women a purpose and strength; this was revealed in the Anti Arrack movement of Andhra Pradesh. (We shall discuss this issue in the last Block of the Course).



Regaining lost identity ! Women in the Panchayat meeting, Borodia village, M.P.

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

The burning question today is the promise of the various political parties of 33 percent reservation of seats for women at the election of Lok Sabha. Though quite a few groups are positive about the introduction of this measure, there are some individuals and groups who are not so confident about the success of such a measure. The initial enthusiasm of the political leaders for such a measure has now been damped. They are putting various arguments against such a measure, prominent being that it would result in 'bahu bivi brigade'. The real reason for the resistance is the threat that a section of men political leaders see to their hegemonic power and influence. The growing assertion of rural women has alerted them to the danger of women exercising power in the real sense and they also feel that they would lose out in terms of physical visibility. 165 women in place of 25 to 30 women members in the Lok Sabha is a formidable number! However the problem of finding women candidates who will be genuinely concerned with public issues including gender issues is a real one. Further women do not constitute a homogenous group thus there are bound to be conflicts among them in terms of class and caste issues. This again raises the question whether there should be a woman's party which expresses commonality of concern and perspective?

Learn From Your Experience 1

Talk to at least 10 women of diverse socio-political background. Try to know from them the reasons both for and against women's participation in formal politics.

5.4 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Social movements are important political processes. Indeed they pave the way for large scale political participation. As a part of daily routine you may not be involved in exercise of power. But by participating in a social movement you may participate in the exercise of power. How is it possible? At this juncture let us discuss the meaning and dimensions of social movements and employment and their inter relationship.

5.4.1 Social Movement and Women's Empowerment

A social movement has been broadly perceived as an organised or collective effort to bring about changes in the thought, beliefs, value relationships and major institutions (including political) of society, and to establish a new social order (Blumer 1951; Toch 1965; Haberle 1951, 1972; Gusfield 1972; Wilson 1973). Organised and intended collective actions are important aspects of social movements.

The central thrust of the process of empowerment, on the other hand, is the dynamic of power. One group can have effective power to control others by having control over resources and ideology. Those who have power are those who control not only material and knowledge resources but also the ideology which governs both public and private life, and are thus in a position to make decisions which benefit themselves. Hence, the process of gaining control over the self, ideology and resources which determine power may be termed empowerment (Battliwala, 1993:71).

Empowerment as a social process challenges the fundamental imbalances of power distribution and relations. It is a process of redistribution of power within and between families and societies, and a process aiming at social equality which can be achieved through disempowering certain structures, systems and institutions. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalise women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. It is also visualised as an enabling process for disadvantaged sections (Sharma,



Struggle for gender justice-a long road ahead

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

1992:29). Thus women's empowerment can be seen as a means of creating a social environment in which women can take decisions and make choices of their own, either individually or collectively, for social betterment. Since women occupy a disadvantaged position in society, the process of women's empowerment will also aid the empowerment of other disadvantaged sections of society. Social movements and empowerment are both social processes. Orientation towards change and identified strategies are the basic components of these processes, and both undergo a process of progression from self-assertion to collective mobilisation. However, collective mobilisation, leadership and identified organisation are the immediate requirements of a social movement. A social movement may cover various issues (social, economic, political), may take diversified forms of collective mobilisation (radical and reformative), and resort to diverse conceptual system. Empowerment also resorts to collective mobilisation, and a gradually identified leadership and organisation emerge with the distinctive conceptual orientation of gender equality. Grass-roots organisations for women's empowerment may be cited as examples. Thus in a given context, empowerment is also a variant of a self-conscious social movement (Singha Roy, 1995).

5.4.2 Peasant Movements and Women's Empowerment

Though the process of empowerment can achieve the status of a social movement in the process of its progression over a period of time, the scope of empowerment of women is also available in latent form in various social movements, especially in peasant and dalit movements. Although within the broad rationale, organisation and leadership structure of these movements the issue of women's empowerment does not get specific attention, these provide enormous space for the articulation of such issues. Such articulation is symbolic and manifested in the form and extent of participation of women in these movements; in the long run such space for articulation may give birth to autonomous women's empowerment movements.

Against this backdrop, the following questions may be raised for in-depth enquiry. Why do women

need an extra space within the broad field of a social movement for the articulation of their problems? Do all social movements provide the required space and the conditions for such an articulation? Do the required scope and condition of such articulation change along with change in the basic character of a movement? We shall examine these questions.

a) Radical Peasant Movements and Women's Participation

It is observed that radical peasant movements promise greater scope for empowerment of women by denying the norms, values and institutionalised bondage that legitimise the subordination and powerlessness of peasant women in rural society. The reformist peasant movements in the form of grass root mobilisations, on the other hand, provide limited potential for women's empowerment since they accept the pre-existing institutional arrangements, norms and values of gender segregation and subordination in one form or the other.

The peasant society of West Bengal for example, has borne witness to the vehement outburst of numerous peasant movements in the 20th century. The most celebrated of these movements were the Tebhaga movement of 1946-47 and the Naxalite peasant movement of 1967-71. One of the significant dimensions of these movements was the phenomenal participation of women at all stages. This movement witnessed a total and spontaneous participation of women in the struggle against the upper caste landowners-cum-usurers. The new found enthusiasm touched even the most backward women of the village. Brave kisan women took the lead in propaganda work, and they often led the men in the fight facing the hirelings of the jotedars (Chakravarty, 1980:87). Women from the peasant and sharecropper households (belonging to the Rajbansi, Palia, Mahato and Colkamar Schedule Castes and Santal tribal groups) took an active part right from the initial stages of these movements by providing hospitality to the participants in secret meetings, giving shelter to underground activists and serving as the latter's communication network, forcefully harvesting the paddy in their own 'kholan' (courtyard), defying the landowners openly, and maintaining the alarm system by blowing conch shells, beating gongs and utensils. They also came to the forefront of the struggle brandishing traditional weapons and showed collective resistance by barricading the strong police force. Many women lost their lives in the northern part of Bengal in police firing. Again, when the movement went underground in the face of the oppressive measures of the state, women came forward to take care of the underground activists by supplying them with food and messages and taking care of their homes and dependents. They also organised self-defence against the attack of the landowners when their male members were underground.

b) Women's Empowerment in Radical Movements

Why did women of the lower rungs of the social and economic hierarchy participate in these movements so overwhelmingly? Did they have a different realisation from that of men of the same socio-economic hierarchy? These questions can be answered in relation to the specific form and extent of women's oppression on the one hand, and on the other hand, by egalitarian concepts and form of mobilisation of the peasant movement that provided a space for women's liberation and empowerment.

Women's oppression and marginalisation are legitimised and perpetuated by the traditional values of caste hierarchy and patriarchy and by the institutionalised norms and values of the society. Socio-cultural and economic factors are integrally correlated with their seclusion, which in turn contribute to their political passivity. Similarly patriarchal behavioural norms and values enormously limit women's access to information, the outside world and productive resources and contribute to their increasing marginalisation. The radical peasant movements challenged these normative social arrangement that legitimised the oppression and marginalisation of rural working class women.



Peasant women's voice-How long the society will ignore it?

Courtesy : CWDS, New Delhi

c) Reformative Peasant Movements and Women's Participation

The form and extent of collective mobilisation of the peasantry has changed significantly in West Bengal over the years. Radical non-institutionalised mass mobilisation has been replaced by institutionalised parliamentary party politics and grass roots mobilisation. The leftist political parties who once sponsored radicalism and militancy to mobilise the peasantry for collective action in the radical peasant movements are now concerned with institutionalised mass mobilisation and electoral politics. The United Left Front (an alliance of the leading left parties) government which came to power in 1977 has been advocating grass roots mobilisation for the rigorous implementation of land reform laws, for improving the economic conditions of the rural poor, and to eradicate the bases of extra-economic coercion. The left political parties have achieved a phenomenal success in their land reform programme and to institutionalise the grass-roots mobilisation. In this process of institutionalised grass roots mobilisation the form and extent of women's participation has been defined and directed within the institutionalised perspectives of the political parties, state and society.

At present the peasant movements in West Bengal have moved towards a reformatist character. There has been a substantial shift in the conceptual orientations of peasant movements. The leftist political parties CPI(M), CPI, RSP, CPI(ML) – Satya Narayan Sinha-Santosh Rana group, under the orientation of 'ideological revisionism' have adopted tactics which opt for slower change. Such a process has helped to reinforce in one form or another the old norms and institutions that either legitimise or promote the marginalisation and deprivation of women. Indeed, the reform initiatives are symbolically wedded to a male-dominated social order.

Following the tactical path of partial ideological modification and revisionism, the reformist peasant movement has been left with little scope to challenge the bondage of the normative structure,

patriarchy, gender segregation and subsequent marginalisation. Selected norms and values of society, in which the powerlessness of women is the traditional expectation, have got wider recognition in these processes. In these processes of mobilisation peasant women have been perceived as 'beneficiaries' of development schemes and not as 'change agents'. In the grass roots politics of poverty they have been subordinate to and dependent on rural political leaders who have accumulated power and wealth. Development initiatives are being implemented through emerging political leaders. In the face of persistent agricultural backwardness and in the absence of alternative avenues of employment a large section of peasant women tend to follow the immediately available political path for the elevation of their economic status (Singha Roy, 1995).

The process of uninterrupted mobilisation, however, has brought a new world view to these women. There is no denying the fact that this mobilisation has made women aware of the processes that have been taking shape in and around their society. In the recent years issuing of 'patta' in joint name of the wife and husband, one third representation of women in village panchayat etc. helped the rural women to get new identity in the socio-political arena of the state. Though in the process of institutionalisation of mass mobilisation they have not been able to eradicate the age-old societal bondage, they have been organised to articulate their issues and to raise the question of legitimacy of this bondage. A thin line of leadership has also emerged from amongst them to be the harbinger of change and equality in society.

Think it Over 2

What do you mean by empowerment? Is there any relationship between social movement and women's empowerment?

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This unit has tried to introduce you with the various forms and extent of political participation of women in the society. Hence we have discussed briefly the meaning and various dimensions of women's political participation. Besides giving the feminist perspectives on women's political participation we have also provided a historical perspective to this issue to discuss the various forms of women's political participation. There have been several linkages between women's participation in the social movements and that of women's empowerment. It has been discussed in this unit that participation in the social movement is an important mode of political participation. This unit concludes the fact that social movement has a crucial role to play for women's empowerment.

5.6 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Adult Franchise** : Right to vote of the adult population.
- Blemishes** : Physical or moral defeat.
- Far Left** : The radical communists like the Naxalites etc. who believed in institutional mass mobilisation and vehement revolution.
- Jotedars** : Traditional big landowners.

- Institutionalisation** : A process of giving legitimacy to an event or to a process in accordance with the established norms, laws, customs and other procedures of the society.
- Productive Resources** : Resources used for the purpose of production viz., land, technology, labour, skill etc.

5.7 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Kaushik, S. (1993) *Women and Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi : Haranand Publication.

Singha Roy, D. (1995) 'Peasant Movements and Women's Empowerment'. *E.P.W.* Sept. 16.

UNIT 6 NEW LOOK AT HISTORY

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6.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This unit aims to explain the need for a new look at history from gender perspective. After reading this unit you should be able to :

- examine some of the problems with the conventional history,
- analyse the social context of emergence of middle class and social reform movement in colonial India,
- discuss the early attempts of social reforms on women's issues,
- explain the form and need of women education of that period,
- describe the context of women's participation in the national movements, and
- identify the need for reconstruction of history.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss some of the issues concerning women that were taken up in the colonial period. This is an important period because the concerted reform efforts in the 19th century later coalesced in the first phase of the women's movement in the twentieth century and shaped many of the agendas of women's organisations.

Our aim in this unit is two fold. First, instead of listing the activities undertaken on behalf of women to improve their situation, we will focus on the context in which particular issues were taken up and campaigns organised. Second, we will look critically at the gender biases in these attempts at reform, and point out the omissions and biases in the conventional history of these period. The

intention of this unit is to discuss these early initiatives in a way that will also uncover the hidden biases of conventional history and show why a new look at history is necessary.

6.2 SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IN CONVENTIONAL HISTORY

The conventional history of reform movements gives us useful information about the many evil practices, such as widow immolation, ban on widow remarriage, kulin polygamy, which existed in the 19th century. It tells us about the spread of English education and liberal ideology in India which, along with the activities of Christian missionaries, brought about a number of movements for social change and religious reform among middle class Indians. It also tells us how these factors led to an attack on socially harmful practices by reformers, how they promoted women's education, and the number of schools and colleges opened for women by the colonial government and Indian reformers. Finally, it tells us that all these efforts emancipated women and brought them out of their homes into the public sphere, and that this process culminated in the national movement in which women participated in great numbers.

In this conventional history many questions have never been asked. How many women were affected by these evil practices? Were all women equally affected or only women from particular castes and classes? How many women were actually confined to their homes? How many women benefited from the new education? What was the content of women's education? What did it actually teach them? How progressive was the British government—what were the gaps between theory and practice? What was the success of the efforts at reform? If the reforms removed some problems did they also introduce new problems and biases? Did the reforms become new ways of controlling women and keeping them in their place or did they genuinely emancipated women? And what about women themselves? Were they merely the silent and passive subjects of reform by men? Would the nature of reforms have been different if women had been able to take the initiative from the beginning? What was the nature of women's participation in the national movement? Did it change their roles as wives and mothers or simply reinforce these roles? How did the colonial economy affect women from different classes and different regions? What were the social relations between women from different castes and classes?

Of course some history which is sensitive to such questions about gender relations is now being written about all the periods in Indian history. This unit is confined to the colonial period and it does not set out to provide a detailed survey of these alternative trends. However, it will indicate some of the new areas that are beginning to be explored and the new questions that are being asked about this period.

6.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The 18th and 19th centuries were a period of upheaval in Europe. The French Revolution, for instance, brought along with it a different philosophy that questioned the feudal, hierarchical order and carried some egalitarian ideas about the equality of all human beings. It did not of course intend to emancipate European women but it did enable women to raise their voices and to reinterpret these ideas. Women in Europe used these ideas in their own struggle for emancipation and made them the basis for demanding equality for women. In this same period new classes emerged in Europe which campaigned for a relatively more secular and democratic society free from traditional constraints. This also

helped women to foreground issues concerning them.

The 18th century in India too was a period of flux which saw the disintegration of the Mughal empire, the emergence of a number of smaller princely states, and many significant social, economic and agrarian changes. New classes also emerged in India as a result of the political economy of colonisation, and they were at the forefront of the new social movements. The medieval bhakti movements which had challenged brahminical strongholds had waned yet they had left legacies that provided footholds for new challenges to the caste order. These factors along with the egalitarian ideas which began to circulate with colonisation were the shaping context of reform movements. They determined both the selection and the definition of what came to be known as 'women's issues.'

6.3.1 The Wider Changes

Conquest and annexation brought a wide area of the subcontinent under direct British administration. The nineteenth century saw a great expansion in the networks of communication, transport, revenue and administration as well as the codification and enactment of laws. The economic policies of the British led to a rapid transformation of India's economy into a colonial economy whose nature and structure were determined by the needs of the British economy. A direct consequence of this was the collapse of traditional handicrafts and industries because of the high import duty on them and the flooding of the domestic market with cheaper industrial products. This economic disruption displaced a whole section of artisans. Peasants who were pauperized due to recurrent famines moved to the cities in search of work and livelihood. Many women who were artisans, engaged in agriculture or other traditional occupations were displaced from their occupations and were forced, along with men from poorer sections, to seek jobs in factories, mills, ports etc, or migrate to the cities as labourers.



Just arrived, joining the urban unorganised labour force

Courtesy : B.Kiranmayi, IGNOU, New Delhi

The British government instituted changes in land relations partly to guarantee revenue for itself and partly to secure the co-operation of native elites. The Permanent Settlement, first made in Bengal, not only turned zamindars into landlords and agents of the government, but also reduced cultivators to the status of mere tenants and deprived them of their longstanding customary rights. The Ryotwari Settlement did not benefit the peasants either.

Women from peasant and cultivating groups were also adversely affected. The actual effects of new land revenue systems on women are now being explored but we do not know enough as yet to give a full picture. The evidence gathered so far suggests that rural labouring women were deprived of customary rights to the land while forest laws entailed the loss of usufructory rights to community property and resources for both rural and tribal women. It also suggests that the new colonial policies by which agricultural land could be sold, transferred and alienated tended to increase the dependence of rural women on men.

If revenue policies created a wealthy and privileged class of zamindars, then colonial educational policies contributed to the growth of a middle class that was also expected to be loyal to the British. However, the position of these classes was by no means uniformly loyal. Sizeable sections among them supported the 1857 rebellion. Though little research has as yet been done in this area, we do know that women from aristocratic families, lower caste and class as well as tribal women also supported or participated in protest movements during the 1857 rebellion. Later in the 20th century, sections of landholding groups, the middle class, and peasant groups, including women, joined the national movement in large numbers and participated in the struggle to overthrow British dominance.

6.3.2 The Emerging Middle Class and Reform Movements

The main issues taken up by reform movements in the colonial period were widow immolation, female infanticide, polygamy, child marriage, widow remarriage, limited property rights for widows, purdah or seclusion of women, education for girls. These were taken up by both British administrators and Indian reformers, who sometimes collaborated with each other.

The conventional history of reform describes all these concerns and efforts as a response to the frequent disapproval expressed by British administrators and missionaries about the low status of Indian women. This disapproval came combined with assertions of European superiority. However, there were other factors at work as well.

Many of these reform efforts were geared to the process of class formation as well as to the need felt by the middle class to make sharper distinctions between respectable middle class women and lower caste and class women. They also addressed other needs of the emerging middle class: women had to be recast to fit into new middle class roles but in ways that would not challenge patriarchal arrangements in any fundamental way (Sangari and Vaid, 1989). All this involved a number of changes. For instance, the sari had to be worn with a blouse and petticoat (the petticoat was adapted from Victorian clothes) as part of a new dress code that would not conflict with Victorian morality (Bannerji, 1995). The daily household routine for middle class women was reorganised to accommodate the new work patterns of men in government jobs as well as the children's school hours (Sangari, 1993).

A major criticism of these reform movements that is being made now relates to their higher caste and class character. They neglected the needs of the vast majority of the labouring women who suffered the brunt of the colonial economy, and who were not affected by the practices listed above since these were largely confined to the higher castes and classes. For instance, these women

were neither secluded nor in purda but involved in agrarian, manufacturing and petty trading or vending activities whether as part of household-based enterprises or as individual workers. Many among them shifted to industrial labour due to famines and pauperization. The hue and cry about removal of purda and women coming out into public spaces would mean nothing to them since they were already working outside the four walls of the home.

6.3.3 The glorious past

The reform movements were influenced as much by western liberal and secular ideas or anglicism as by British Orientalist and revivalist ones (Chakravarti, 1989:27-28). This mixture was itself partly a reaction to and partly a result of British policies.

There was a widespread tendency to revive what was considered to have been a glorious Hindu past. This conception of a glorious Hindu/Aryan past was in part created by colonial administrative discourses and the divide and rule policies of the British government. It propagated the belief, common among higher caste reformers, that "Mughal rule was the period in which Hinduism declined and was corrupted citing the Hindu woman as a prime example of community degradation" (Kumar, 1993:8). The Vedic period was seen as a golden age for women, especially as far as learning and ownership of property were concerned, and many harmful 19th century practices—widow immolation, female infanticide, female illiteracy, purdah, child marriage—were said to be caused by Muslim rule or foreign invasions.

For instance, the Arya Samaj, rejected idol worship, set out to revive several practices from the Vedic period and painted a glorious picture of Hindu women in ancient India (Chakravarti, 1989). The ideal picture of the Hindu woman from the past painted by them and many other social reformers was intended to be a model for 19th century women.

Not only did this ideal model exclude women from lower castes but at times it was also used to defend brahminical practices and the caste order. It also aggravated divisions on religious lines since it ignored the fact that many of the harmful or oppressive practices that were being attacked were not confined to Hindu women but also involved women belonging to other religions. It produced a 'Hindu' bias. The effects of this bias can often be seen in the conventional history of reform where the history of reform efforts is separated according to religions—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and so on. This tends to obscure the fact that a number of oppressions and issues were common to middle class women as a whole regardless of which religion they belonged to.

Now historians of ancient India have begun to show that this ideal woman from the glorious Hindu/Aryan past was largely a mythical 19th century invention that had little basis in reality. They have pointed out that all evidence in support of this theory has been drawn from very limited geographical areas. Further, this evidence is drawn solely from brahminical sources and whatever little ritual and social status the upper caste woman may have enjoyed was gained through the exploitation of non-Aryan women and men. What is more, these same brahminical sources actually reveal that the subordination of women to a patriarchal system was in fact highly developed in ancient India, and women were considered to be property. The bride was gifted to the groom along with other goods. Women were excluded from many material and ritual transactions and given a limited recognition only as wives and mothers. And the position of learned women as scholars was not only marginal but also subordinate to the social power of male scholars (Chakravarti 1988, 1989; Roy, 1995).

One material result of the invention of a glorious past was the attempt to define ancient and 19th century middle class Hindu women as fundamentally different from western women. This produced

stereotypes of both Hindu women and western women which bore little relation to reality. They were used either to prove that Indians had a past equal to the standards of the enlightened west or to show that contrary to British beliefs Indians were capable of self government, or to claim that Hindu traditions had their own superior resources and did not need to borrow from the 'west'.

Regardless of the intention, the invention of a glorious past and these stereotypes introduced, paradoxically, a new traditionalism. This new traditionalism tended to seek the sanction of the Shastras for every reform that was proposed for improving women's situation. And, they often became a basis for asserting that because they were different from western women, Hindu women did not require the same legal rights or the same access to resources as western women. Or they became a way of setting limits on the modernization of women. The ideal Hindu woman, whether ancient or 19th century, was represented as one who would acquire literacy or even learning but resist any contamination by western or modern ideas. She would remain firmly embedded in familial and patriarchal structures, she would be a Sati-Savitri despite her education. Anti-westernism thus became an ideology intended to keep women in their place and helped to perpetuate patriarchal practices. This has had long term consequences for Indian women.

Think it Over 1

What were the social impacts of prolonged British rule in India?

6.4 SOME EARLY ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

In the sections to follow we will look at some of the early campaigns, concerns and movements towards gender equality. We will focus only on the more pertinent issues.

Do You Know 1

A. Few Features of the Reform Movements

- a) First, these were dominated by men: women did not begin to speak about these issues till the latter part of the 19th century. It is not accidental that the history of reform till the late nineteenth century is dominated by the initiatives of men like Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chander Sen, Vidyasagar, Syed Ahmad Khan, M.G. Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati, Behramji Malabari etcetra. Many of them worked with government support and/or founded organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj (1825), the Prathana Samaj (1867) and the Arya Samaj (1875). The names of women only begin to appear in the latter part of the century. Even when women themselves became active, it was difficult for them to break away from the patterns of thought set by male reformers. In fact in the late 19th century and subsequently even in the nationalist movement, some of the women who participated actively took conservative positions on gender issues because of the powerful legacy of male reformers. However, other women such as Pandita Ramabai, Rukhmabai and Tarabai Shinde had begun, by the end of the 19th century, to question the biases of male reformers in areas such as child marriage, the fate of upper caste widows and so on.
- b) Second, the majority of male reformers attacked patriarchal excesses, in other words, only those practices that were extremely cruel or visibly violent. Reformers seldom challenged the wider social and kinship structures of subordination, the sanctity of marriage and the family, the sexual division of labour, or the caste hierarchies which perpetuated inequalities.

The few male reformers who did so have not been given the same prominence in the conventional history of social reform. For example, much less attention has been paid to the Maharashtrian reformer Jyotirao Phule who attacked the caste system and demanded education for low caste women from a different perspective, that is, an education that would give them the strength to reject the subordination imposed on them by law, custom and tradition.

- c) As a consequence, these reforms were limited and hardly brought about structural changes. Most male privileges and the texture of women's daily lives were to remain intact until women themselves began to question them.
- d) There were bitter controversies and various tendencies in reform movements. These resulted from the lack of homogeneity among the new middle classes which included people from different castes, religions and regions, who often straddled the rural/urban divide.
- e) Finally, there were sizeable regional differences and variations, and these reforms spread quite unevenly over the subcontinent. Regional patterns still need to be isolated and explored in terms of similarities and differences in class and gender biases. Since Bengal was among the first regions to be taken over by the British, it is not surprising that campaigns for reform appeared first within the emerging middle class of Bengal.

6.4.1 Widow Immolation or Abolition of 'sati'

Thousands of incidents of widow immolation, popularly known as sati, occurred in the early decades of the 19th century in Bengal.

The British administration initiated a debate though earlier they had not wanted to interfere in such matters, since they thought this would interfere in the religious beliefs of the Hindus. The 1812 regulation introduced in Bengal to curb widow immolation was based on a selective use of shastric interpretations brought in the invidious categories of 'illegal' and 'legal sati'. The regulation set out to ensure that only those immolations that were 'voluntary' and in keeping with the scriptures should be permitted (Mani, 1989). Not only were the regulations totally ineffective in their stated purpose of discovering 'illegal sats' but they also led to an actual increase in the numbers of incidents, for they were widely interpreted as being a sign of official government approval of widow immolation (Datta, 1988:19-70).

Rammohan Roy actively supported the campaign against widow immolation. He founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1815. His first pamphlet came in 1818. The British too supported the campaign. In 1818 the provincial governor of Bengal, William Bentinck prohibited the practice in his province. After nearly 11 years the prohibition was extended to other parts of the country and the Sati Abolition Act was passed in 1829 when Bentinck had become Governor General of India. In subsequent decades the practice was legally prohibited in the princely states as well. In 1930 Rammohan Roy along with others signed a petition supporting the abolition. The petition gave further evidence that there was no shastric basis for widow immolation. There was some amount of protest from 'orthodox' sections who sent a petition to the Governor General the same year while the Dharma Sabha was formed in Calcutta to campaign against the abolition. But there is also evidence from Rajasthan, where immolation was most prevalent among kshatriya royal families, to show that women welcomed the prohibition.

Rammohan Roy used the Shastras as his reference point to condemn widow immolation. He was of the opinion that there are no prescriptions in the Shastras saying that widow must be immolated.



Uprooted ! Satithal once of the Borodla village, M.P.

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

He thought that on the contrary the practice was degrading Hindu religion and a sign of the degeneration of Hindus when compared to ancient times. However, he also saw it as a social rather than a religious practice and related it to women's property rights. According to the Dayabhaga system of inheritance prevailed in Bengal, a widow could inherit the property of her deceased husband if she had a child even if the family was undivided. This could have been one of the reasons why caste groups afraid of losing traditional authority structures and interested in acquiring the widow's property were resorting to the practice.

In response 180 pundits published a manifesto saying that Rammohan Roy was incorrect. The so-called Hindu orthodoxy argued that immolation gave women access to a form of virtuous knowledge which they were otherwise denied. To this argument Roy's response was that the lives of women showed that they possessed virtuous knowledge anyway as they were more self-sacrificing than men. He also argued that it was an ascetic life for widow's that had scriptural sanction, not immolation.

Ironically, these notions of a widow's duty and a Hindu women's nature as essentially self-sacrificing was to become a mark of distinguishing them from western women. If the reforms helped to abolish a cruel practice, they also turned women into symbols of religious identity.

Significantly, Bentinck too referred to the shastric texts to show that there was no religious basis to the practice of widow immolation. Though Hindus did not rely on any one text or a set of texts and there were many regional variations, yet the British continued to refer to shastric texts on many issues related to women including personal laws later. Interestingly, many British administrators and Orientalists in the early 19th century saw their role in India as one of restoring ancient practices on the lines of scriptural models or as purifying those practices which had become degenerative because of Muslim rule.

The ambivalence between secular egalitarian ideals and the creation of a glorious past, then, ran as an undercurrent through the abolition debates for both Indian and British reformers. A similar ambivalence surrounded the issue of widow remarriage.

6.4.2 Widow Remarriage

Through the nineteenth century the interaction of reform movements with British Orientalism and later German Ideology increased. Both of these also produced their own versions of the Hindu/Aryan golden age (Chakravarti, 1989).

Like other campaigns, the campaign for widow remarriage was also criss-crossed by various ideologies, and one of them was the reform of Hinduism. It was also a higher caste issue since widow remarriage was practised among many lower castes. However, the situation of lower castes in this matter cannot be idealized either as we will explain later.

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar launched a campaign for widow remarriage and like earlier reformers he too referred to shastric texts to defend his argument. However, he had a hierarchical view of both caste and gender and for him, as for many other reformers, remarriage was also a means for regulating the widow's sexuality (Bandyopadhyay, 1995:28-29) The debate was taken up by the vernacular press. There were arguments in favour and against it. Vidyasagar translated his tract for widow remarriage and gave it to British officials. In 1855 he submitted a petition to the Governor General asking for a law recognizing widow remarriage. Counter petitions were submitted in large numbers against the proposed law.

As the British were following their own codification of Hindu personal law, what was needed in effect was repeal of British law against widow remarriage. Many lower castes already practised widow remarriage but in this campaign it seemed as if Hinduism was a single homogenous religion and as if everyone followed the same customs. This false 'Hindu' monolith found expression among both people who campaigned for and against widow remarriage.

The British government too failed to distinguish between those patriarchal practices which cut across castes and classes and those which were confined to particular groups. When it passed the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, it added a clause :

"classifying the kind of property the widow had a right to upon remarriage. If property came from her husband or the right to maintenance or inheritance or willed property, she had to forfeit this in case of remarriage unless the husband's community explicitly express that she may keep the property, which was rare."

The widow was debarred on remarriage from any right to maintenance or inheritance from her husband's property while the guardianship of her children was vested with the relatives of her deceased husband. In effect widows would have to make a painful choice between remarrying and keeping their children!

The new Act also made remarriage difficult for lower castes and tribes who did not have a customary bar on widow remarriage or practised levirate marriage, and also allowed a widow to keep her property on remarriage. Kumar (1993) points out how groups who practised widow remarriage could use the new Act to deprive widows of their property and at the same time to adopt higher caste customs:

"Lucy Carroll has cited various instances in which the distinction between kinds of property rights for widows was used by relatives to dispossess them in communities

which had by customary law allowed both widow remarriage and the retention of property. Interestingly, one of the examples she gave was of a case brought by members of a tribal family, claiming that on her remarriage one of the widows had forfeited her right to the property she owned. The case was won on a minimal show of evidence that certain Hindu practices have been adopted by some branches of the tribe (the Rajabamsis). The court held this sufficient evidence to bring the entire tribe under the scope of the Act. Thus the Act provided mercenary reasons for non Hindus to Hinduize their customs.”

The Act thus strengthened male control over property, reinforced patrilineage, and made it more difficult for women who came from groups who practised widow remarriage to remarry.

Not surprisingly, the Act legalizing widow remarriage did not help upper caste widows much either. Though it raised social consciousness about child widows and upper caste widows and gave a greater social legitimacy for remarriage in theory, it did not increase their actual number much. It was found several decades after the Act was passed that there were very few remarriages and the ones that did take place were usually of ‘virgin’ widows: “High caste widows who were not ‘virgin widows’ did not — and could not — remarry” (Kumar, 1993:19).

Do you Know? 2

“In 1905, when the **Hindu** published a letter from a Brahmin called K. Subramania Aiyer, saying he wanted a widow to remarry, they received a reply from a woman reader who signed herself ‘virgin widow’ and asked whether ‘Mr. S.A. would marry a ‘sudra widow’. In his reply he said he would, ‘as the Shastras provided for the Brahman the privilege of marrying a woman of any of the three lower castes.’ Though the implication quite clearly is that it was all right for a Brahmin male to marry a woman of any status as he could only raise her status, while she could not affect his, it is difficult to believe this was the way things were in practice. Other reports show that several South Indian reformers who married widows were ostracized in different ways, many of them found especial difficulty when it came to performing funeral ceremonies. Surely then, marriage to a lower caste widow would be treated with even greater severity?” (Kumar, 1993).

As we mentioned earlier, the situation of lower caste women cannot be idealized either. For example, widow remarriage in a levirate form (marriage to husband’s brother) was commonly accepted among Jat peasants in Haryana. The colonial state supported this form of remarriage for social, economic and political reasons and enforced it through administrative and judicial agencies. However, it was experienced by widows as a repressive system from which they often tried to escape. Widows themselves had little control over their remarriage, whether through levirate or otherwise, as all decisions regarding it were made by their families (Chowdhary, 1989 and 1995: 51).

More than legal pressures were at work among lower castes who practiced widow remarriage in at least the north and in Bengal. These could be quite complex. The higher castes portrayed widow celibacy, that is the taboo on widow remarriage, as one of the most authentic symbols of the culture of the respectable classes. As a result the socially and upwardly mobile sections of the lower castes and classes also began to adopt the taboo and so reinforced the hegemony of higher castes. There is evidence from Bengal of the increasing discontinuation of widow remarriage among lower castes (except among the most menial groups) from the late nineteenth century. The attachment to British Orientalist ideas, the emphasis on the Shastras as opposed to customs, and the spread of scriptures through print together reinforced this tendency (Bandyopadhyay, 1995).

6.4.3 Other Reforms

There were many other reform issues of equal complexity that gained momentum by the late 19th century such as child marriage, the age of consent etc. which we cannot go into here. Each had its own context, and these contexts too varied in terms of region, class and caste. In these issues too shastric legitimation was sought and many arguments ranging from the biological, psychological, moral to the anti-western were used. A number of legislations affecting women were also passed. Each was accompanied by controversies and subject to limitations. Women too had become more vocal in protesting and writing petitions. By the 1880s many organisations formed or run by women were beginning to emerge.

The single issue that dominated the entire century was education for women. Let us turn to this.

Think it Over 2

Can you write an essay on the major issues involved in the early social reform movements in India?

6.5 WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Though there are many regional variations in this as in other issues, the pressure to provide education for girls did increase through the 19th century. Many different types of institutions emerged; missionary schools, government run or aided schools, local and neighbourhood pathshalas, zenana education (education at home by women teachers) and so on.

The missionary schools in particular attracted persons from the lower castes and classes, and one of the issues that frequently arose was the refusal of upper castes to send their children to schools attended by lower castes.

Though we still need more data about the caste and class breakup of education to get an all-India picture, on the whole two tendencies are visible. The first was the demand by middle class men for modern English education and some were willing to extend this to their women as well. The second was the need to affirm a non-western identity through women. This was sought to be achieved by ensuring that women were only educated in the vernacular or classical languages (Sanskrit, Arabic) but not in English. Anglicisation, especially of women, was perceived to be a threat by many reformers such as K.C. Sen and Syed Ahmad Khan.

6.5.1 The Need for Education

Whatever the differences among reformers may have been on the method and place of education for girls, and whatever the difference between them in terms of religion and occupation, most of them believed that women's education should not be geared for jobs or earning money. The only economic rationale that could be accepted was that women should learn some skill that would help them to survive in times of need or if they were widows (Sangari, 1993). Though some reformers argued for women's education in the name of equality, they were agreed that the purpose of women's education could not be the same as that of men. Rather their education had to be for moral improvement, religious knowledge and geared to produce better wives and mothers.

The orthodox objections to the education for women were that it would make women immoral, they would neglect their housework, refuse to obey husbands, parents and in-laws, and begin to

imitate western women. Reformers argued back with the claim that educated women would read the scriptures for themselves and thus become more pious and better able to distinguish between good and evil. The improvement of women's morality through education would lead to greater obedience and better service of husbands and in-laws. They would discard superstitions, learn basic facts about health, hygiene and morality and thus be better mothers. Better mothers would breed better sons, this in turn would improve future generations of Indian men and lead to the progress of the nation (Sangari, 1993).

The aim of education was conservative and many women who upheld education used the same arguments. Thus Kundamala Devi advised women: "If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to *memsahib* like behaviour. That is not becoming to a Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant uneducated woman" (quoted in Chatterjee, 1989:247).

6.5.2 The Syllabus

This conservatism would not have been so significant if it was confined to making pragmatic arguments to convince unwilling people of the need for education. Unfortunately it reinforced the division between the public and the private sphere, and it shaped the content of education and the syllabi for several decades.

The state itself encouraged and perpetuated gender discrimination in the curriculum. Religious instruction was often compulsory for girls. Their syllabus was often restricted to subjects considered appropriate for better housekeeping such as arithmetic for daily accounting and domestic skills such as maintenance of household goods and furniture.

The textbooks written for girls stressed the importance of housework and tried to ensure that women would continue to perform their household duties alongside education. The textbooks themselves taught women what their ideal roles as daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, and employer of servant women should be. And they advocated constant labour, thrift and restricted consumption for women (Sangari, 1993). Many schools including Brahmo schools did in fact teach cooking, sewing etc. Though higher and professional education for women did emerge eventually it was limited and available to a small number of women.

Thus literacy for women came with many constraints. And the colonial state far from being a liberal 'modernizing' agent was itself quite traditional in these respects. If women benefited through education over a period of time it was despite these constraints.

Think it Over 3

What was the ideology of women's education during the early phase of social reforms in India?

6.6 WOMEN AND NATIONALIST STRUGGLE

So far in this unit we have restricted ourselves to some key campaigns in the 19th century. And we have tried to establish the gaps and biases in reform campaigns that were to plague the women's movements that emerged later and against which women had to continue to struggle.

Some of these biases were to reappear in the national movement in the form of ideologies of domesticity and self-sacrifice. However, the picture became more variegated with women's own entry into

the political arena and into the more organised struggles for national independence. There were different types of movements under the broad aegis of nationalism and they had differing political agendas and gender platforms. Women joined the Indian National Congress committees, took part in all forms of civil disobedience and were prominent in the communist party and revolutionary terrorist groups. It is not possible to describe the whole range of movements here or to examine the relation of each to questions of social reform, but in some respects women were beginning to move out of the conservative legacy of 19th century social reform.



"We have always been with the nation" - Nationalism and women in contemporary India

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

There was also a significant relationship between women's movements and nationalism. Though male leaders such as Gandhi exerted a profound and shaping influence on women's participation not all of women's activities were constrained by male leadership. The women's movement in its first phase made important links between patriarchal practices and imperialism. The All India Women's Conference was formed in 1927 to discuss the issue of women's education but soon broadened out to child marriage and purda and then confronted the question of political subjection. It emphasized that women's aspirations could only be achieved if India became a self-governing country. The issue for women's vote was raised first in 1917. Though the British government did not support it, the Congress did. Women's organizations agitated for it and their arguments went much further than those of many nationalist men. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay wrote that a woman's rights as a citizen should not depend upon her marital status.

Finally, another significant change that occurred during the nationalist period was the broadening of the base of women's movements. Even though domestic ideologies defining women's roles did not change much, the field of organisation and struggle did come to include working class women (as in Bombay) and peasant women (in the Tebhaga movement and the Telengana struggle). In the course of these struggles, new questions about women's oppression in the family and workplace were raised, this time by women themselves.

Think it Over 4

Can you write a note on the role of Indian women in the nationalist struggle? Try it.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS : A NEW HISTORY?

The second aim of this unit was to acquaint you with some of the new trends in writing women's history. Many of the issues discussed above are being explored by recent writing that reappraises the colonial and nationalist periods. It may be appropriate to conclude with a tiny sample of these developments which you may wish to follow on your own.

Much more attention is being given to women's work both as paid labour, and as unpaid household labour carried out within familial contexts of conflict, hierarchy and dependence (Sangari 1993, Engels 1996, Chakravarti 1998, Mukherjee 1995). Writers are now looking at the way in which women internalised reforms but also began to shape their own agendas, at the links between the regulation of female sexuality and reform issues such as widow remarriage, the situation of upper caste widows in relation to domestic labour and nationalist ideologies (Engels 1996, Sangari 1993, Chakravarti 1998). Many unconventional sources for the history of gender relations are being used such as oral accounts, folklore, proverbs, women's autobiographies and other personal narratives by women (Karlekar 1991, Chakravarti 1998, Chowdhary 1995). In time such work will substantially alter our preconceptions about the past.

6.8 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Chakravarti, Uma (1998) *Rewriting History: the Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*. Delhi: Kali for Women.

Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.) (1989) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. Delhi : Kali for Women.

Kumar, Radha (1993) *The History of Doing*. Delhi: Kali for Women.

UNIT 7 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

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7.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This unit aims to introduce you to the various facets of women's movements in independent India. After India achieved independence new issues cropped up in our society. New types of political structures also emerged. After reading the previous units of this block you may be asking the questions as to what happened to the women's issues after independence? What were the new forms of women's movements? After reading this unit you should be able to :

- Explain the various problems involved in the description of women's movements in India;
- Describe a few forms of women's movements in rural India; and
- Discuss various forms of women's movements in urban India.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the earlier units of this block social movement is closely associated with political processes since social movements aim through collective mobilisation either to change or to resist change in societal arrangement(s). All social arrangements have an implicit or explicit relation with the power structure of the society. And social movements basically aim to alter or protect these power structure. Women's movement has emerged as an important means for women's participation in the political processes of society. These movements have given women opportunities to articulate their issues and to influence the power structure in order to change some of the institutional arrangements of society for women's development.

Women's movement in India has gone a long way. It has acquired so many diversified facets in

recent years that it is best to describe it in the plural not as a movement but as movements. As women in India are not a homogenous category, the issues involved in women's movements in various parts of the country are also not the same. All these make it difficult to describe women's movements in India. We have begun this unit with a small description of the problems we faced while presenting women's movements. Here we discuss the continuity of women's movement, the changing socio-economic scenario of India after independence which have affected the forms of women's movements. In the next two sections we discuss women's movements in rural India and in urban India. While describing rural India, we have selectively presented the cases of Srikakulam, Bodhgaya Land Struggle and Chipko movements. For urban India we have also discussed only a few selected issue based movements viz. violence against women, anti-dowry movements, misrepresentation of women in the media and the right to health.

We are aware of the fact that there are many more movements that could have been added. But we leave it to your own curiosity and imagination to investigate other movements.

7.2 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS: FEW ISSUES

Real life stories are never easy to tell. I am sure you have experienced the difficulties one faces even in recounting a real family event. Every member has a slightly different version to tell. Recounting women's movements in independent India is a bit like that. There are many accounts. And so they must be for India since it is a complex and diverse society. We have tribal women and modern metropolitan women. And we have tribes from the North East and tribes from Madhya Pradesh, women in the slums and women in mansions in the cities. There are rural women and within them are both Dalit women and Brahmin women, women agricultural workers and women in landholding castes, upper and middle, forward and backward women. How can their stories of struggles against oppression and discrimination be the same? Women's movements in India therefore have to be told in their plurality. This is easier said than done. What we try here therefore is to present a kind of picture of the whole. It is by no means exhaustive. It is only indicative of the range of issues that women's movements have taken up in independent India.

7.2.1 Continuity with the Past

India became independent in 1947. Let us begin here. This too is not easy, for the women's movements did not begin with independence. Some of you may have looked at the material on the women's movements in colonial India. Women's issues emerged as important social reform issues in the nineteenth century reform. It was mainly concerned (though not entirely) of the middle class, upper class, caste sections. The attempt was to do away with social evils like sati, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, purdah. Mocked by the British, condemned by the missionaries, social reformers took it upon themselves to remove these practices and to demonstrate that religious texts did not condone them. Reform and education of Indian women thus were at once an agenda for social reconstruction and an essential aspect of the cultural assertion of nationalism. So strong was this aspect that even today many accounts of Indian women begin with a mandatory: "In the Vedic period the status of women was very high and then there was a decline," Or "Muslim women in India are victims of discriminatory customs not sanctioned in the Koran". We do not know whether the status in the Vedic period was indeed so high or not. Or whether the texts can have only one interpretation. What we do know is that while the story of the upper caste women are a plenty, we know little of the Vedic Dasis.

This tendency of recounting the story of the upper classes and castes as the history of the nation.

is a common practice. We thus know mostly about the Congress leaders as history of the national movement with a few women like Sarojini Naidu thrown in between. But alongside those about who we know and read, where are the ordinary women, students and peasants, industrial workers and middle class housewives who participated in the national movement? While breaking out of purdah may have been important for the middle class Muslim women and upper caste Hindu women, equal wages, maternity leave and occupational hazards were important for the industrial workers. Caste oppression for dalit women and sexual abuse of tribal women were issues that were taken up even before 1947. Sometimes they were part of broader organised movements, sometimes local resistances. Issues were many. Concerns varied. When we think of women's movements in independent India we have to keep this broad picture in mind.

7.2.2 Changing Scenario After Independence

India became independent in 1947. India was also partitioned in 1947. The partition of the subcontinent was accompanied by enormous suffering, killings and displacement of people. It is amidst grave division and communal bitterness that the new Indian state took over. Notwithstanding this, freedom from colonial rule and great hopes of a modern Indian nation state meant that reconstruction of the nation became the first priority of the state. Unfortunately at this time, many older women's organisation, like the All India Women's Conference, the Young Women's Christian Association and the National Federation of Indian Women, which had been active before independence became relatively inactive. A possible explanation could be the feeling that great hopes were pinned on the new state and now that India was free many of the issues that were being raised earlier would be resolved. A free sovereign government was expected to bring in the required changes.

With the end of the 1960s a generalised political and economic crisis gripped the country. Protest movements grew stronger as the promises of independent India had by then proved to be largely unfulfilled for large sections of people. The policy of planned economic development resulted in heavy industrialisation and agricultural capitalisation, but led to a host of new possibilities of conflicts. Land reforms, an important agenda of the national movement was not taken up seriously. Rural inequality and dismal poverty of the rural masses remained. Urban poverty and urban unemployment were also serious problems. Increased radicalisation provided the youth and students with a way of directing their anger and grievances against the state for its failed promises. Matters came to a height with countrywide agitations in the mid-seventies. The ruling government responded to them as law and order problems and finally imposed emergency in 1975.

We draw this picture for it is against this context that arose what some scholars term as the second wave of the Indian women's movements. The state had responded to the crisis by a declaration of Internal Emergency. The unprecedented scale of human rights violation during the long emergency further gave rise to movements against human rights abuse including sexual abuse of women. Thus arose alongside the older organised movements, newer movements outside the organised political party framework. The women's movements represented the same plurality and newer developments.

We have mentioned at the outset the difficulties of trying to give any one account of the Indian women's movement. For just as there are many diversities within India there are many women's movements. What binds them together is the political, economic and social context of the political entity that is India. We attempt below to give brief accounts of the different movements. The list is only illustrative of the wide range of issues that constitute women's movements in India.

Think it Over 1

Various changes have taken place in Indian society after independence. Can you give a description of the socio-economic and the political context in which women's movements have taken shape in Independent India?

7.3 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN RURAL INDIA

Agrarian struggles have a long and rich history in India. One attempt to mention a few will of course entail omission of some. The accounts here are therefore strictly selective with a focus on how women were involved, and how their involvement made its presence felt on the movement itself. We begin with Andhra Pradesh, not only because it was the site for the great Telengana struggle led by the undivided Communist movement where women played a significant role but because agrarian movements marked the Srikakulam district in the late sixties and early seventies too.

7.3.1 Srikakulam Movement

Srikakulam district, topographically, has two distinct regions: the hill tracts and the plains or coastal areas. Prior to the division of the district, Srikakulam had the highest density of tribal population (about 260 persons per sq. km.) in the scheduled areas of the state (census of India, 1971). Women among the tribals had an important role in economic production. While men were mainly hunters, toddy tappers and forest labourers, women were usually engaged in cultivation on the hill slopes. The strenuous labour that included clearing of bushes, transplanting, weeding, threshing, winnowing, harvesting, bunding or embankments is undertaken mostly by women. In addition, they also have their domestic responsibilities that included carrying water, pounding of grain, cooking, rope making and cattle rearing. This meant that economic issues of the movement were as much women's as men's.

These economic issues were the right to cultivate, especially *podu* which is declared 'illegal' by the state, access to forest and forest produce such as timber, tamarind and firewood, wages for forest labour, customary forced labour or *vetti*, occupation of tribal land by non-tribals, especially moneylenders, interest rates charged by the latter, payment for forest produce both by state-owned agencies and private traders, and harassment by forest officials. All these issues were directly related to women's economic activities.

In the plains (which formed part of the Srikakulam district) the issues were a little different. Here apart from wages of agricultural labourers the movement took up the issue of control of waste land, mortgaged land and illegally occupied land of the poor peasants. Significantly, here women-specific issues were more conspicuous. According to Sampoomamma, one of the few surviving leading women activists, one issue which helped bring women together in the Mahila Sangham was the sexual abuse they suffered at the hands of landlords and moneylenders.

Similarly the men's addiction to liquor was also a source of tension for the women. Very often the liquor merchants were moneylenders themselves and thus men became indebted to them. The Mahila Sangam organised an anti-liquor campaign. Women rallied together in destroying the liquor brewing pots. Mention must be made here that there were more restrictions on women from the plains in participation in this kind of mobilisation. The relatively smaller hold of patriarchal control on tribal women led to their greater participation. This point is important to appreciate the complex ways in which economic, cultural and familial factors work together in the role women play in particular

movements. It is always difficult to give exact figures of women's participation. For as mentioned in the introduction we tend to record more of the doings of upper and more visible sections than we do of the rest. And even within representation of the marginalised classes, women are further marginalised. But a perusal of the First Information Reports (FIRs) in over 1,800 instances recorded in a large number of police stations scattered all over, gives an indication of the extent of women's participation. In the period of armed struggle and brutal state action women faced torture but refused to divulge information detrimental to the movement. Altogether about two to three thousand women faced persecution.

Apart from their heroism, women's participation also led to debates within the organisations pertaining to relationships between men and women, sharing of everyday chores and role of women in leadership.

We write in relative detail here of the Srikakulam movement for the issues raised are common to large parts of rural India, whose stories do not find mention here. But they are very much in the annals of the histories of the Indian women's movements.

7.3.2 Bodhgaya Land Struggle

It is in the background of state repression in the mid-seventies that the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (CYSV) emerged in January 1975 in Bihar. The CYSV initiated a debate on women's right to land and access to productive resources, the institution of marriage and men-women relationships. I quote here a Chamar woman's view :

Land is passed on from father to son. Even the jewellery that is a gift to a women on her marriage is not given to her, it is kept by her parents-in-law. If a man dies or remarries, the woman is completely dependent on others for her survival. A man can gamble or drink away his land but a women is always concerned about her children. She can never see them starve, she would do all in her power to raise them to the best of her ability. So land should be owned jointly both by the husband and wife.

Land rights for women became an important issue. Two slogans of the CYSV make their position clear: *Aurat ke bina, har badlav adhura hai* (without women's participation, any social transformation is incomplete) and *Aurat, harijan aour mazdoor, nahin rahenge ab mazdoor* (women, the low castes and labourers will no longer be at the mercy of others).

Throughout the CYSC movement against the math (the Bodhgaya Math which had concentrated large tracts of land and power) women constituted 30 to 40 per cent of those active in the struggle. Hundreds of women faced the bullets of the math and the state police.

Apart from the courage women displayed, this movement raised a wide range of issues that extended from the most inter-personal aspects of men-women relationship to that of crucial structural issue like land rights. The basic understanding put forth was that there was a close connection between the institution of family and political and economic institutions. Hence there was a two point campaign, against wife beating, drinking, child marriage as well as social equality of women which would entail their rights to land and other resources.

7.3.3 Chipko Movement

We have learnt about the struggle of the poor women in the south, about their battle for equal rights in Bihar. We now try to give an account of the Chipko movement led by women in the hills of

Uttar Pradesh, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction. To understand the issues involved in this movement we need to travel a little further into the past. Colonial forest policy was based on Britain's need for wood for its shipbuilding and surface transportation. Forests were declared state property despite people's protests. The early years of the twentieth century saw many such struggles in Uttarakhand. After 1947, 30th May began to be observed as a shaheed diwas; on this day each year people would collect to hold discussions on forest problems.

The early seventies saw the beginning of the movement. People demanded an end to the contractor system of forest exploitation, supply of forest produce to the villagers at concessional rates, and forest revenue settlement. People pledged not to permit the cutting of young tree for making agricultural implements.

Concerted attempts were made by contractors and forest officers to win over the men and allow tress to be felled. This problem came into sharp focus in November 1977 at village Advani in Tehri Garhwal's Hewal Ghati. The men had agreed to the felling of trees. At this point Shree Dhoom Singh Negi came to the village, and sat down under a tree on hunger strike. On the fifth day of his fast, the village women announced their decision to hug the trees marked for felling: they were determined to save these even at the cost of their lives.



The message of Chipko is now popular even among the young girls visiting Uttarakhand.

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Soon after this campaign of women the government sent a forest officer to win over the women. A delegation of women met him in broad daylight, holding lanterns; they wanted to dispel his ignorance and tell him that when forests are cut, new forests do not spring up in their place as the soil and water resources dry up. The forest officer put forward his scientific arguments in favour of forest felling, and ended his speech with a slogan; *Kya hai jangal ke upkaar, Leesa, Lakdi, aur vyapar* (what are the benefits of the forest: forest produce, wood and commerce). To this Bachni devi, the leader of the women countered: *Kya hai jangal ke upkar, mitti, pani aur bayar, zinda rahne*

ka oadhar (what are the benefits of the forest: soil, water and pure air, the essence of life. Thousands of women present at the meeting repeated the slogan.

A few days later the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) paraded the streets to terrorize the people. On the first of February 1978, the contractor went to the jungle with the tree fellers. The PAC followed close behind. Before the axes could strike, the women hugged the trees and attached themselves to them.

The movement spread. Attempts to resume felling continued. Sunderlal Bahuguna began a fast to ensure the non-violent character of the movement. The contractor's men sought to set fire to his hut. Bahuguna eventually was arrested. This further fuelled the spread of the movement. Eventually the government agreed to resume discussion.

Apart from the ban on the commercial felling of green trees above the Shivalik Talhatti, these women forced the government to impose ban on the felling of food, fodder and fuel bearing trees, and to plant trees within a three kilometer radius of villages. But most significantly, the women of the hills gained enormous self confidence. For us, as we read about them, we are once again forced to think about the wide range of issues that the Indian women's movements have taken up.

Think it Over 2

As you have understood by now that there are several reasons acting behind the emergence of a social movement. Can you list the major reasons for the emergence of Srikakulam, Bodhgaya and Chipko Movements. What are the major reasons for women's participation in these movements?

Do You Know? 1

Story of Rural Women's Struggles is of Indigenous Origin

We began on the note that in our account of movements we will omit more, much more than we can possibly include. But these three stories will perhaps give an insight into the range and strength of the Indian women's movements. It will perhaps also be a fitting reply to those who claim that the women's movement is a western, urban, upper class phenomenon with neither roots nor links to the Indian cultural milieu.

Indeed the adivasi's struggle in Dhulia raised issues of marriage laws, health issues, and right to be included in the panch system. The militancy of fisherwomen of Kerala to ban trawl fishing raises issues of rape and wife beating within the family, or the battle of bidi workers of Nipani for protection of the health of workers, for better prices for tobacco and mobilization against the *devadasi* system are only a few more examples of the rooted nature of the women's movements in India. We draw attention to this because in the recent past we have had the experience of the media focus on the feminist protest against the international beauty contest in Bangalore with comments suggesting that the Indian women's movements only raises such issues. Apart from the fact that the beauty contest was as valid an issue as any other, such comments also make invisible the long and arduous struggles launched by Indian women on other issues.

7.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN URBAN INDIA

We now come to urban women. But here too it is important to remember that all urban women are not similar, either in their socio-economic background or in their problems. The issues at hand are many and varied. Just as we have had a history of rural women's participation and resultant influence on the nature of agrarian struggles in the colonial period, we have had a long history of working class women's struggles in the trade union movements. Women textile workers were found active in strikes way back in the last century in Bombay. Middle class women organisations were debating issues of marriage laws, education and purdah not in big cities alone but in numerous small towns all over the country. Both these two trends—the working class and middle class—continued into independent India. But along with them came a new resurgence of the women's question in the seventies. We begin our account there, with a focus on the campaign against violence which can be traced to the post-Emergency period (1977) when civil liberties groups, progressive organisations and political parties brought to light numerous instances of police atrocities, torture and lawlessness.

7.4.1 Violence Against Women : A Political Issue

In the post emergency period, the Supreme Court reversed the verdict of the Bombay High Court and acquitted two policemen accused of raping a 14 year old tribal girl from Maharashtra called Mathura. The judges believed that she had willingly consented and the fact that she was not a virgin implied that she was of loose moral character. Soon after followed the cases of Rameezabee in Hyderabad and of Maya Tyagi at Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh. In both instances policemen raped the women and murdered the husbands. Many more such stories came to light.

These cases generated an immediate and spontaneous protest. The Forum against Rape was formed and attempts to build networks among women's groups across the country intensified. Around the same time, in Delhi, women's groups and concerned individuals investigated a few suicide and "accident" cases of young married women and found that they were in fact murders committed by their husbands or in-laws. A joint front of women protested on the streets in front of the houses of the victims. These actions of the Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch, a coalition of over 30 women's groups, received wide and sympathetic press coverage on what came to be called "bride-burning".

These well publicised protests against rape and bride burning seemed to have triggered off a public chain reaction from 1980 onwards, catalysed the formation of many new women's organisation, alliances, and the "discovery" of different forms of violence on women. Today, the campaign against violence includes:

- Domestic violence
- Wife battering
- Sexual harassment of women on the streets and at work place
- Their degrading portrayal in the media
- Alarming increase in sex determination tests and abortion of female foetuses
- Widow-immolation
- Violence committed on women during communal unrest and riots.



United for a change, helping reduce violence against women.

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

Do You Know? 2

Public vs Private Domain

Violence as an issue has also questioned the process of compartmentalization that exists in our society between the public and the private. What goes on within the family is deemed personal and out of bounds for outsiders to intervene because of this division. A common example is that of wife beating which neighbours know of and yet pretend ignorance. For a while societal norms condone wife beaters they do not condone well meaning outsiders who come to the assistance of a woman being beaten or worse still killed for dowry. The husband is supposed to be the best judge of what should or should not be done.

The raising of wife beating as a public issue has led to a point that many more women than ever before are willing to protest and seek help. The State has responded positively by amending the Criminal Law to introduce Section 449-8A which makes cruelty by the husband or his relatives a cognisable, nonbailable offence with a maximum punishment of three years along with a fine.

7.4.2 Dowry and Dowry Deaths

Dowry was earlier known as *streedhan* or woman's property, to be used by her and given to people of her choice. It was a form of inheritance for women in a land-dominated, agricultural economy. Today, dowry not only means gold, clothes and utensils needed to set up a new home, but lavish weddings, and consumer items like scooters, cars, refrigerators, or cash needed for the groom's education or business. Over the years it has spread to communities and tribes where dowry was not prevalent at all.

The first voices of protest against dowry were raised during the nationalist struggle. Gandhi saw it as a corrupt social evil linked to the caste system. The late seventies and eighties saw the rise of dowry related deaths. Women's organisations took up these cases in a big way. A joint platform called **Stree Sangharsh** organised demonstrations outside the houses of the victims and demanded punishment for the murderers. The campaign also emphasised consciousness at a broader level. Mass pledges were taken against dowry. Some interesting slogans emerged out of these actions.

- "Stree par na ho atyachar, hum padosi jimmevar" (the women should not be harassed, it is we neighbours who should be responsible)
- "Nek gharon ki yeh pahechan, bahu beti ek saman" (ideal homes are those where the daughter and daughter-in law are treated equally)
- "Tilak nahi dahej nahi, shadi koi vyapar nahi, kharida hua jeevan sathi ab hame sweekar nahi" (no to the tilak, no to dowry, marriage is not a trade, we will not accept a life partner who has been purchased).

Learn from Your Experience 1

Go through any of the national dailies of last one month to collect information on types of violence committed against women in various parts of our society. Also try to find out whether there has been any protest on these crimes by any organisation or group. Based on these information try to develop a note on "Crime Against Women in India: Will it Go Unabated?"

7.4.3 Misrepresentation of Women in the Media

Indian women are most often shown in the media as docile, submissive, sacrificing, sentimental, superstitious and incapable of rational action. Two films, *Pati Parmeswar* (Hindi) and *Gabaraicha Nahi* (Marathi) were banned by the Censor Board for their derogatory portrayal of women. The ban was, however, lifted by a High Court judgement on the basis that the film only reasserted Hindu tradition against the popular onslaught of western values and upheld the institution of marriage.

Indeed this critique of the women's movement as being against tradition is often made. This leads us to the question as to how we define tradition. Like the nineteenth century reformers, the women's movements are asking ; "Is dowry our tradition? Is bride burning tradition too? Is wife beating our culture? Is rape our culture?"

Women's organisations have mobilised opinion around the issue of representation of women in the media. The *Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini* (Patna) claim that they were the first to put up a ladder and tar these offending hoardings in 1979. In Madras the *Pennurammai Iyyakam* took out a procession of around 500 slum women, students, housewives, office workers who painted up obscene film hoardings. The campaign continues today as advertisements become more aggressive in painting an image of glamorous Indian women, of a world distant and remote from most women. Our accounts of agricultural labourers and tribal toddy tappers, fisherwomen and bidi makers show that most women are essentially producers. The housewife spends the entire day 'working', cooking, cleaning, childrearing, food processing, stitching. Yet in the world of advertisements women are simply consumers and dolled up objects.

7.4.4 Right to Health

It is a common saying in our society that "a woman prepares the food but is the last to eat". This key saying is indicative of both the physical and social aspects responsible for women's poor health. A study on energy expenditure and calorie intake shows that women expend 53 per cent of human energy on survival tasks while men use 31 per cent and children 16 per cent. A corresponding look at calorie intake shows that women consume 100 calories less than what is expended. Between 60 to 68 per cent of pregnant women suffer from anaemia and it is quite common to find many of them suffering from night blindness during and immediately after pregnancy.



Organising for women's health

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

It was up to the women's movement not only to document these facts but also build up a movement for the right to health. Health encompassed a wide range of issues, both physical and social. It included both the reproductive aspects and broader issue of nutritional imbalances of the girl child, as well as the numerous occupational health hazards which women workers faced. Some of the important health issues often highlighted in the women's movements in India are given below:

i) Occupational hazards

94 per cent of women workers fall within the category of unorganised and self employed. Their work has been categorised as heavy manual work as in mining, construction or agriculture; home based work or housework, weaving, beedi rolling; service sector, vending and processing and other small industries like fish processing or slate pencil manufacturing. The repetitive work, the lifting, hammering and bending, the often noxious substances they handled combine to undermine their health.

ii) Repeated pregnancy

Today, on an average, a woman becomes pregnant eight times in her prime reproductive age (15-45 years). Of the children born of these pregnancies, three to five survive. Needless to say this is detrimental to women especially in the absence of health care facilities and proper nutrition.

iii) Pressure of fuel, fodder and water

The degradation of natural resources, thanks to unplanned developmental plans which have forced the poor women to walk much more every day for fuel, fodder and water. The double burden of private and public work takes their toll on the already poor health of women.

iv) The state obsession on health as fertility control

Women's organisations have persistently exposed how the state policies tries to see women's health only from a family planning perspective. Since the focus is on contraception, often women are not provided ante natal care if they do not agree to family planning.

v) The campaign against injectible contraceptive

Women's organisations have campaigned vigorously against the contraceptive Depo Provera (DMPA) and its carcinogenic effects. Attempts have been made for its use in India. Poor women are the usual victims.

Do You Know? 3

Legal campaigns

Legal campaigns have always been an important part of Indian women's movements. Aware that law in itself cannot bring social change, women's organisations understand the significance of law in helping society to move towards a more gender equal society. Equal wages for equal work, and maternity rights have been part of the struggles launched by the trade union movements. As mentioned earlier, in the 1980s the cases of Mathura and Rameezabee led to a nationwide campaign for amendments in the rape and dowry laws. The other important area where legal changes have been demanded has been in the personal laws based on religion. These family laws define and regulate relationships between members of the family; they relate to marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance and stand apart as the only laws in the Constitution which are different for different communities.

Think it Over 3

What are the major health hazards for women in India? Can these issues take the form of organised social movements? Who should take the leadership? Try and get answers to these questions in view of the texts presented in the previous subsections and your own experience as well.

7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

India is a society characterised by great diversity. This diversity is not just cultural, linguistic, regional or religious. Differences are sharp between classes, castes and tribes. While a great deal of commonality mark women's lives, subordinated as they are in a patriarchal society, equally important

differences divide women of upper castes from their Dalit counterparts, upper class women from working class women.

The Indian women's movements reflect this plurality of issues and sometimes approaches. The struggle against widow-immolation is carried on simultaneously with the struggle of women in the beedi industry. The struggle against media glamourisation of women which reduces her to an object is carried on along with the fight against the effects of structural adjustment policies which will affect women most as subsidies on food, medicine, transport are withdrawn.

This plurality notwithstanding a basic unity binds these issues, products as they are of a similar socio-economic structure. To illustrate, glamourisation of the Indian middle class women (as evident in the near epidemic of beauty contests) and the curtailment of subsidies on food, health and education are part and parcel of the same new economic policies. Women face the adverse effects more. And they face them differently depending on the section of society they belong to. These are some of the issues we discussed in this unit.

7.6 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Process** : A series and "interrelated activities or actions by which some thing takes a shape.
- Status** : Position of a person or group in the society. It not only includes formal or ritual position but also other aspects related to health, legal, educational, political participation, economic resources etc.

7.7 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Kumar, Radha (1995) *The History of Doing*. New Delhi : Kali for Women.

Singha Roy, D.K. (1992) *Women in Peasant Movements: Tebhaga, Naxalite and After*. New Delhi : Manohar.

UNIT 8 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH ASIA

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8.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This unit will provide you an overview of women's movements in the South Asian countries. After reading this unit you should be able to :

- Describe the socio-economic profile of the South Asian countries,
- Present the overview of the status of women in these societies,
- Explain the major facets of women's movements in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and in India, and
- Analyze the major issues involved in the women's movements of these countries.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Women's movement has become a world wide phenomenon. With the rise of consciousness even the women of the remotest villages of the globe are now resisting the oppressive conditions imposed on them since ages. All these resistances have given the shape of women's movement of recent years. There are several questions which you may like to ask: Are the issues involved in women's movement all over the globe are the same? Are the forms of resistance against the gender oppression the same? We have examined these questions focusing on the societies of South Asia, which inherit

a relatively similar social fabric and economic foundation. Within a limited space it is very difficult to cover the host of issues and struggles. To give focused treatment to this broad subject we have provided at the outset an overview of the social and economic profile and status of women in South Asia. The major problems faced by women of these societies are also discussed here. We then selectively discussed the major facets of women's movements in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. The issues involved in these movements are also discussed selectively.

8.2 WOMEN IN SOUTH ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

This unit seeks to give you a glimpse of the women's movements that are taking place in the South Asian region. There is great deal in common in the social, economic and cultural world in which South Asian women are located, be it Pakistan, India, Nepal or Bangladesh. Since the problems women face in India are so similar to the problems women face elsewhere in South Asia, it is not surprising that the issues raised by the women's movements in the respective countries are also very similar.

8.2.1 Socio-Economic Profile and Women's Status

The largest section of women in South Asia are dismally poor, eking out a meagre subsistence at the lowest end of the agricultural and the non-agricultural sectors. It is important to remember that at present **agriculture** is still either a primary or an important supplementary source of income for the bulk of the rural population in South Asia. Only a small portion of the total labour force, and even less of the female labour force, is employed in the manufacturing sector. Also, whether engaged in agriculture or not, a significant proportion of the rural population, (which in 1990s) constituted 74 per cent of South Asia's population, is dependent on forests for its survival needs. In other words **land** is important for them. And in the entire region women do not have access to land rights. Women work on land, tilling and sowing, harvesting and threshing but have no control over either the ownership of land or of the income accrued from working on it.

The world for women in manufacturing is not very different. Once again they are at the bottom. Most often confined to the unorganised sector, they are in low wage, arduous tasks – be it the making of bidis, rakhi, paper packets, bangles or putting together of electronic products or working in food processing, garment manufacturing or construction. Security of job and income are distant dreams for this large segment.

The status of women at work and at home are closely related. At home for the most part they occupy a secondary status notwithstanding their economic contribution. We thought for a long time that the household was a unit where all members, men and women, boys and girls were in an identical position. Today we know that considerable intra-household gender inequalities exist. **Members within a household share benefits unequally.** In large parts of South Asia women and female children have less chance to avail of food and health care. This is revealed in gender differences in one or more of the following indicators: malnourishment, morbidity, mortality, hospital admissions, health expenditure and especially in the adverse, male female ratio (i.e. the number of females per males). Though the extent of this anti-female bias varies cross-culturally, it exists in some degree almost everywhere; The bias is strongest in northwest India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, where sex ratios are particularly low, it is much less in south India and Sri Lanka, which although, still female adverse, are closer to parity.

Furthermore women of poor rural households spend the incomes under their control very differently

from the men. Women of poor households spend almost entirely on the family's general consumption while men spend on personal needs such as tobacco and liquor.

These then are the common conditions of poor rural and urban households who constitute the largest group in the South Asian region. In this context it is ironical that we have had a woman Prime Minister in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. To a large extent it is the anti-colonial movement coupled with women's movements in these countries that made possible the emergence of an educated section of middle class women who entered public life. Today too this section has a visible presence in articulating the demands of women. This by no means suggests that poor women are helpless victims. Indeed they too have been in the forefront of movements ranging from the environmental protection to opposing sexual violence, from struggling for land rights to resisting fundamentalism.

8.2.2 Everyday Resistances of Women

Before we move on to the accounts of the struggles that women have launched and participated in, it is important to stress that women, however poor and distressed have always sought to resist discrimination in their everyday lives. It is perhaps this tendency to resist that gets further momentum with their participation in organised struggles. We will give some illustrative accounts.

Within the family, women have sought to resist on the one hand inequalities in resource distribution, and on the other hand the authority of male members such as parents-in-law and husbands. In Bangladesh, for instance we read how:

Women told us usually what other women have done. For example, one woman stocked rice in another woman's house so her husband would not know she had it. Another woman had a neighbour raise a goat for her so her husband would not know about it.... Yet another woman has opened a pan business with her young son and has told him to keep their earnings a secret from the husband. Most women say that they hide their savings in holes in the bamboo, in the root, or under piles of cloth.

Such responses are also observed in other parts of South Asia. For instance village women in India and Pakistan are found to secretly sell grain to get some independent access to cash so that they would not need to ask their husbands for money every time a curd vendor or cloth seller appeared. Women in Nepal and Sri Lanka too work out their own strategies in their everyday lives to have some space of their own—be it time with friends or money for the children. A rather sad account from Sri Lanka narrates how women coir workers are often found hiding their money in different parts of the house, so that after a beating, the woman can disclose one place, thereby giving the illusion to her husband that she has handed all her savings to him.

What however, is different between such covert individual resistances and public, collective movements is that normally movements consciously challenge the structures of inequality. In the first cases women seek avenues for release from the stranglehold of patriarchal control. But they do not challenge it. Society would call the acts described above as wrong, as theft, as cheating. These resistances transform into movements when women jointly question the arrangements which force them to conceal money from their husbands and demand justice as a legitimate right.

8.2.3 Issues of Women's Movements

By now you know two aspects of women's movements. One that in the colonial period women played an important role not only in the national movements but also in raising the women's issue

as a central issue in public life. Many of them were middle class women, many were not. Just as on one hand we had demands for education, ban of purdah and segregation we also had militant peasant movements like Tebhaga and Telangana which brought tribal and peasant women into the forefront of political action. Two, that women however poor and oppressed seek avenues for resistance though often they are covert. The women's movements are a leap forward for they question male control directly and raise women's problems as legitimate demands, worthy of public attention.

Learn from Your Experience 1

Make contact with a NGO and try to find out how poor women seek to counter their oppressed condition. What are the strategies adopted by this NGO towards this endeavour?

It is not easy to summarise what the women's movements in South Asia are doing today. Fortunately for us, attempts are being made by women of the region to work towards greater co-operation. One such attempt was made by the **South Asian Women's Causes** to present what women of this entire region consider central to their demands.

The forum identified the following themes.

- i) Economic and Environmental
- ii) Political Empowerment of Women
- iii) Violence Against Women
- iv) Trafficking in Women
- v) Religious Fundamentalism and Ethnic Chauvinism

The central understanding informing the demands was that women in South Asia are doubly oppressed as women, and for belonging to countries following economic policies and financial mechanisms geared towards growth and benefit of the developed countries. The major barriers to women's political empowerment they felt were:

- i) Women's unequal access to political power which is reflected in their social and economic positions.
- ii) Discrimination in employment, property rights, social rights, education, and health.
- iii) Fundamentalism, criminalisation, communalisation and the increasing flow of money are the biggest barriers for women's entry into politics.

The other major theme which was raised is violence, as it affects women within the family, in their workplaces and often comes from the community and the state. These express themselves not only in the form of sexual violence but also through social and economic discrimination, e.g., child marriage, dowry, polygamy, unequal wages, custodial rape and violence prevalent during armed conflicts including terrorism and communalism.

8.2.4 Religious Fundamentalism

South Asia as a whole is also witnessing the growth of religious fundamentalism and ethnic chauvinism.

Women are particularly targeted as the preservers and symbols of cultural and religious identities and thereby become objects of control. This process has led to the reversal of the rights of women and demands to restore what is considered original culture. In India we have witnessed the struggle between the women's movements and traditional communities spokesperson about widow immolation which is glorified as sati. Even today the battle continues with strong views claiming the right to sati as a right to culture. We have also seen the conflicts over Shah Bano, with the so called spokesperson of communities claiming their right to decide on what women within a community were or were not entitled to, and the state reversing its decision to grant maintenance to Muslim women. In the following sections we will learn about the struggles of women in the different South Asian countries.

We cannot possible provide a comprehensive account of women's movements for every country. What we seek to do therefore is to present actual snippets from women's magazines and writings from the countries – real life stories which will give you a glimpse of women's movements in the different countries. The accounts, we hope will expose you to what is happening in those countries and learn how close we in South Asia are in our struggles. By no means are the accounts exhaustive. They are illustrative. We hope however that these accounts spur you to read more and also dispel stereotypical beliefs that South Asian women are helpless victims of oppression.

Think it over 1.

Do you think this it is morally and ethically wrong to hide money from the husband, or is it a justified attempt to break away from men's domination? Answer in the given context as described above.

8.3 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN NEPAL

On December 2, 1992 an estimated two thousand women marched through the streets of Kathmandu demanding women's security from both the people and government of Nepal. Signs bearing messages such as, "To sell girls is to sell the country" and, "Lifelong imprisonment for rapists" filled the streets.

Organised by the **Women's Security Pressure Group**, the march coincided with an international campaign for activism against gender violence. Beginning at the open theatre in central Kathmandu, women including numerous representatives from women's groups, students, housewives and twenty six village women circled through the streets distributing leaflets and encouraging onlookers to participate and support their cause.

Barefooted and determined, 26 women traveled 15 km. from their village Thokra demanding justice for the violent murder of Sarita Adhikari. Investigations were never carried out. Signs of the victim, as they found her, carried by these women served as reminders to the people of the ongoing injustices done to the women of Nepal.

As an initial response to the increasing number of reported rape cases, over 20 women's organisations from varying political ideologies joined forces in June 1997 to pressure their governments and communities to initiate a major change in attitude and policy towards women and their safety in Nepali society today. The organisation, called **The Women's Security Pressure Group (WSPG)** has created a list of demands and submitted to the Nepali government. It reads as follows:

- i) Occurance of rape cases should be completely stopped.

- ii) Proper action against those criminals should be taken; none should be freed on bail.
- iii) Laws mandating 20 years imprisonment for those convicted of trafficking girls and women should be enforced.
- iv) Those convicted for trafficking girls and women are still free in several districts. Pressure should be put on the concerned district authorities to enforce the law by arresting these criminals immediately.
- v) The government should provide the Bombay returnees (erstwhile sex workers) with education and employment opportunities.
- vi) All discrimination of women must stop immediately.
- vii) All advertisements which project women in derogatory fashions must be stopped.
- viii) Sale of pornographic material must be stopped.

Think it over 2

Is rape an act that betrays an individual psychosis, or is it more broadly related to the domination of women by men?

The struggle against violence should by no means suggest that women's movements in Nepal address this issue alone. Before we go onto other issues however a few words on why trafficking is such a major problem in Nepal. It is estimated that over 150,000 Nepali women and girls are working in India's brothels. There have been reported cases of HIV+ women returning from Bombay. No account exists of those unreported.

Do You Know? 1

This problem of trafficking is closely related to the widespread problem of poverty. 70 per cent of the population live under the poverty line. In Nepal, 70 per cent of the household income is derived from subsistence agricultural sector and women contribute over 50 per cent of time and labour in its production. Again almost 66 per cent of time given by adults for firewood collection comes from women.

The life of poor women in rural countries is one of hardship and deprivation. It involves long arduous days spent working in the fields, collecting fodder, fuel and drinking water. Indeed this paucity of water is reflected in their cultural lives. We have songs such as:

I am a daughter so beautiful

How should I fetch water?

If I fetch sitting,

I am smaller than a pitcher!

If I fetch standing, My waist hurts....

Nepali folklore and folk songs are full of such descriptions about sweet and bitter experiences of women in relation to water. Women's organisations have grasped the significance of women

as haulers, users and managers of water resource. As a study of the village Boson showed, in an average family size of six and average livestock number of two, the average amount of time they spend fetching water is 1.7 hours per gagri (local water pitcher). As one respondent put it, "one person from the family has to be engaged full-time in providing water for the household". Significantly women's groups in the other South Asian countries too have taken up this issue.

Learn from Your Experience 2

Try to collect some folk songs which speak of women's condition and relate these songs to the contemporary situation of women in our society.

A relatively new development that marks the South Asian countries, some more than others, is the role of non-governmental organisations which take up issues of women's development and along with this also take up issues which only women's movements used to take up earlier. A close link has thus developed between the two, particularly in some countries such as Bangladesh. For instance in Nepal in July 1992, a new project called **Didi Bahini** was founded. Conceived by a Nepali NGO, "Women in the Environment", Didi Bahini is a model training programme whose goal is to strengthen women NGOs through leadership development and management training. The project not only addresses theoretical issues, but emphasises action as well. The following skills are taught during the project's duration: 1) writing a statement of mission, 2) board development, 3) programme evaluation, 4) use of volunteers, 5) fund raising, 6) strategic planning, 7) proposal writing and 8) computer and English training sessions.

8.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN SRI LANKA

As in India, the nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the emergence of various forms of struggle in Sri Lanka. There were two major classes involved. One, the **working class** including the working women in the plantation, working women in urban and rural sectors who joined in the working class struggle for economic and political rights. And two, the middle class women who campaigned for equal status alongside middle class men and others who demanded radical changes in existing society. With the expansion of education for women and the emergence of a group of professional middle-class women, especially doctors and teachers, political consciousness among women grew in the first decades of the twentieth century, a few joined nationalist organisations. Several middle class and professional women, many of them wives of nationalists and labour leaders, formed the **Women's Franchise Union** in 1927 and in December that year they organised a public meeting to demand voting rights for women. This right was accorded to all women of over 21 years of age by the Donoughmore Constitutional Reform of 1931.

Do You Know ? 2

The rise in women's consciousness brought about by education in Sri Lanka was channeled primarily into struggles for political and franchise rights. Women were also concerned with social welfare issues. Dowry was a social issue around which an agitation was built up. The first and last attempt to deal with it legally was in 1938 when Dr. A. P. de Zoysa proposed in the legislature that giving or taking of dowry be made illegal. The motion was defeated by one vote.

8.4.1 Working Class Struggle

Along with the struggles of the middle class arose working class struggles. The Attorney General

in 1916 objected to exempting women from the provisions of the Labour Ordinance on the grounds that 'labourers employed in the estates are very primitive and a woman may be as capable of giving trouble as a man.' An outcry broke out and continued until the law was repealed in 1922. In the plantation sector the first trade union was formed in 1931. After 1945, many Tamil women from the estates became active in the trade union movement.

In the early 1930s, a **Youth League** of radical nationalists and socialists were formed. When the anti-imperialist **Suriya Mal Movement** was formed in 1933, in opposition to the sale of poppies, its best known members were women, many women teachers and students not only made the yellow Suriya Flowers emblems but also sold them on the streets in face of the opposition from the colonial authorities.

Contemporary Sri Lanka has been in the midst of a bitter and protracted ethnic conflict for a long time. The women's movements articulate this concern. A look at the demands raised by the **Feminist Forum** on Women's Day in 1996 offers us a glimpse. Committed to the defence and promotion of women's rights it writes:

"The Forum is deeply concerned with many problematic changes, enormous danger and hardship that women are experiencing as a consequence of the ethnic conflict. The increasing militarisation of women's role in the conflict, the magnitude of violence against women in the militarised zones, and the large number of female refugees of all communities urgently compel support for the resolution of the conflict through peaceful and just means. The Forum opposes the use of violence by any party as a means to resolve the conflict. It supports the devolution package while recognising the shortcomings therein, and calls upon all parties to engage in constructive dialogue that will lead to the implementation of the package without unnecessary delay."

The point that one will notice is that women's movements, whether in Bangladesh or Pakistan, Sri Lanka or India, all oppose sectarian violence. They stand up for a wider unity knowing fully well that women are the worst victims of the passions that are unleashed in the name of cultural or communal identity.

8.4.2 Issues for Sri Lankan Women

Other issues that Sri Lankan women have taken up are listed and commented upon below:

i) Participation of Women in Political and Public Life

While the position of both the president and prime minister in Sri Lanka are held by women, this does not reflect an overall high representation. Women are markedly absent in the upper ranks of judiciary and poorly represented in provincial councils and local committees.

ii) A Common Civil Code of Law

Sri Lankan women are subjected to the laws of their respective ethnic or religious communities especially in areas such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

iii) Nationality

Current Sri Lankan laws have a harsh, gendered impact on the definition of citizenship itself. Sri Lankan women who have foreign husbands are denied the right to pass on Sri Lankan citizenship to their children, and spouses face major obstacles to local employment, while no such debilities are imposed on Sri Lankan men who have foreign wives.

iv) Implementation of Legislation on Violence Against Women

Though the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women had submitted their recommendations regarding the need for local legislation on domestic violence no action had been taken by the government. The Feminist Forum called for active lobbying while also expressing their view that laws against sexual violence within the family such as marital rape and incest are either absent or inadequate.

v) Reform of Abortion Laws

In Sri Lanka abortion is still illegal with the result that women who are not socially or materially privileged resort to back alley abortion and therefore endanger their health and lives.

vi) Redefinition of Family

Families in Sri Lanka take many forms. With the violence in the north and south, local and international and economic changes there is an increase in female headed households as the conflict has led to widespread disappearance and death of men. Yet laws and policies persist with the assumption that women are confined to reproduction and child rearing tasks.

vii) Sexuality

Issues of sexuality are as volatile and complex in Sri Lanka as they are in the rest of South Asia. The pressure to marry and bear children are closely linked to traditions of female chastity and virginity. State policies are based on these cultural assumptions and thereby deny the rights of unmarried women and unmarried mothers.

viii) Feminisation of Poverty

The globalisation of the economy and national structure adjustment programmes have contributed to the feminisation of poverty in Sri Lanka, as it has elsewhere in the North and the South of the globe. As women tend to be mostly in the informal sector, in home based production and at the lower end of the formal sector, any fluctuation in economic policies have a severe impact on women. This is particularly true because state policies persist with the belief that women earn only to supplement the male breadwinner's earning.

Think it over 3

Can feminisation of poverty and violence against women, be countered by legislation alone?

ix) Women Workers

While the female labour force in Sri Lanka has expanded significantly over the last decade, Sri Lankan laws do not adequately address their concerns, such as working conditions, the right to organise or even the enforcements of minimum standards required for industrial labour.

x) Women and the Media

Recognising the major role that the media plays in both perpetuating and challenging stereotypes, the Feminist Forum acknowledged the steps taken by English language newspapers to provide room for women's perspectives, while noting the Tamil and Sinhalese papers were less willing to provide a critical forum for women.

xi) Health Care For Women

The deterioration of health services and the decline in nutritional standards have had a strong impact on women. The women's movements therefore have demanded state and community

measures to improve nutritional levels of women, the recognition of women's rights to reproductive choice and informed family planning methods, the strengthening of gender sensitivity in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, and the guarantee of confidentiality in HIV/AIDS testing.

Do You Know? 3

NGOs' Activism in Sri Lanka

We have noticed that increasingly women NGOs have campaigned for women's rights. This was true of Sri Lanka too. NGOs however are distressed at some recent developments that affect the autonomy of NGOs including women NGOs. The Government had proposed certain amendments to the Voluntary Social Services Organisation Act. The original law enacted in 1980 empowered the state to inspect the premises and even attend meetings of the organisation. Attempts to further empower the state regarding this is being resisted by women NGOs. A common concern that emerges from the accounts of the different women's movements in South Asia is a **united commitment towards democratic rights of the society as a whole**. Thus Nepalese women's movements referred to the recent beginnings of a democratic system in Nepal. We will notice how the concern marks the other movements too.

8.5 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN PAKISTAN

The women's movement in Pakistan today has a dual agenda. It addresses a range of women's and development issues both practically and in research. It also plays an advocacy role lobbying with the government for legislative and political reforms. Like the rest of the subcontinent, women had played an important role in the struggle to end the colonial rule. In the progressive movement of 1936 women focussed on the fundamental rights of women to education, property and voting. It was at that time that Hijaaz exclaimed:

The colourful scarf on your forehead looks lovely. It would be better yet if this scarf were to become a flag.

As a Pakistani woman scholar writes "In the movement for Pakistan, women literally removed their dupattas and made them into flags. The Pakistani movement provided the first opportunity for women to work collectively towards a goal – albeit a nationalistic one." She further writes that at that time women participated in large numbers at a public meeting in Karachi. In contrast, she writes that in today's Pakistan it is claimed that the appearance of unveiled women on the streets, demonstrating and protesting against the state, is seen as inappropriate and undignified.

Soon after Pakistan was formed, two women's organisations were established. One was the **Women's National Guard** organised by Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan and the other was **Women's Voluntary Service**. At that time there were millions of refugees from India and the problem of rehabilitation was central. Since service and nurturance were considered women's natural duties, there were no objections to the work of the organisations. This organisation later became **APWA (All Pakistan Women's Association)** and raised issues of health, education and family laws within the framework of welfare and social reform.

8.5.1 Pakistani Women and Democracy

The first avowedly political organisation was the **Democratic Women's Organisation** which

comprised middle class women who came from families with a political background rooted in Left politics. DWO raised issues of equal wages for equal work, transport services and basic facilities for workers, and issues of non-militarisation and peace.

Do You Know? 4

In 1955, the **United Democratic Front** was formed in Pakistan to struggle for women's rights. This organisation was formed by Begum Nasim Jehan and its focus was on legal reform. This struggle was also taken up by APWA and there was a joint demand for a commission to be set up for legal reform. This commission was constituted and based on its recommendations, the Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 was promulgated during the regime of General Ayub Khan.

There was demand for adequate representation of women in the government and the Constituent Assembly. In a report, Begum Jehan Ara Shahnawaz demanded that women's representation should be at least 10 per cent. In the constitution of 1956, women's right to representation was acknowledged and women were given the double vote. Much later, in the 1980s, **Women's Action Forum** reiterated the demand for the double vote. The idea was that women should have a vote in the general elections as well as be assured representation in the Assemblies (through another vote) as part of affirmative action considering that women did not have equal access to education and other opportunities. The purpose was to encourage women to enter politics based on a notion of equity. Only women would vote for female education and only women would vote for women candidates so that accountability could be ensured. However, no elections were held under the 1956 Constitution with the result that women were never able to exercise the right of the double vote.

8.5.2 Women's Rights in Pakistan

In 1958 when General Ayub Khan imposed martial law, all political activity was banned. In 1964 when Fatima Jinnah fought the election against Ayub Khan, questions about women's right to stand for public office were raised immediately. Though the Jammah-e-Islami raised the question of women's role in public sphere, the mullahs were in favour of Fatima Jinnah for their own political interests. When the struggle against Ayub Khan's dictatorship began, women were also at the forefront of this struggle.

During Zulfikar Bhutto's time in the 1970s, women gained some opportunities to push for progressive measures. Two women were included in the Constitution-making committee and were at the decision-making levels right from the beginning. In articles 25 and 27 of the Constitution of 1973, it was stated there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex.

During General Zia-ul-Haq's period (1977-1988), there were attempts to negate any progress made by women and to make women secondary citizens under the guise of Islamic laws. A large number of women joined the movement at this point of time. They were analysing the implications of the religious campaign being used to close the doors of economic and other opportunities to women. The *Hudood Ordinances* and the *Law of Evidence* were promulgated to block women's attempts for progressive rights. In 1981 when Fehmida Allah Bux was sentenced a hundred lashes as an Islamic punishment, women realised that if they did not protest their very existence would be threatened.

At this time democratic forces were being crushed and there was no freedom to dissent. Women came together and collectively raised their voice. This collective voice came to be called *Women's Action Forum (WAF)*.

WAF raised a voice not only for women's rights but also against military dictatorship and the demand for the restoration of democracy. WAF demanded that the Constitution of 1973 should be reinstated. It also asserted that elected representatives had the right to make laws. Those raising their voices for minority rights and democratic freedom were encouraged by the actions and demands of WAF. There was an alliance of students, lawyers, cultural organisations and some members of progressive political parties, all of who created a joint front against dictatorship and martial law.

WAF continued to raise its voice against different government measures including the formation of a separate women's university and the restriction on women from participation in spectator sports. During the years of the formation of WAF, women in rural Sindh were involved in the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD). When the MRD movement ended, the women formed a rural-based mass organisation by the name of *Sindhiani Tehreek*. It raised issues of education, health, sale of female infants and karo kari (ritual killings of women and men who try to escape the feudal order).

The women's movement also took up issues about the revelation of religious identity on ID cards and the condemnation of the Qadianis on passport forms. Rights of religious minorities were also taken up. An anti-obscenity bill was on the anvil which would have affected the private lives of individuals. The bill would have empowered the police to enter any one's house and search it without a warrant as well as check to see if 'immoral' activities were going on. The success of the women's movement lies in the fact that the situation could have become far worse at various levels without their struggle. While the laws were not replaced or changed, it became difficult to implement them with impunity. The punishments devised under the *Hudood Ordinances* were not implemented and this is attributed to the strength of the women's movement. The women's movement in Pakistan has been a dynamic force in its historical and political contexts.

Learn from Your Experience 3

Discuss with other students on the theme: Is democracy more conducive to gender equality than dictatorship?

8.6 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN BANGLADESH

By now you would have got familiar to a certain extent of the issues that the women's movements in the region have been taking up. You would have noticed that the women's movements have a very wide vision. They are very aware of the significance of a democratic and secular social order. Be it in Sri Lanka or Pakistan, India or Nepal, democratic rights for all including the minorities are always raised by the women's movements. Contrary to popular perceptions women's movements have a vision of a more just social order—a vision which is neither confined to the economic nor familial but which is informed by an integrated understanding of how the economic, cultural, political and familial are interlocked with each other. The status and roles of women are determined by all these factors.

The same foresight can be discerned from accounts about the movements in Bangladesh. As in the case of other countries we base our account on the writings of the women's movements of the concerned countries. One such document begins with:

In spite of being one of the poorest, backward and dependent countries of the Third World and South Asia, Bangladesh is a non-aligned, free and democratic country.

And further:

The basic principle of democratisation is that the rights of all citizens must be recognised and guaranteed irrespective of gender, caste or creed. The attainment of civil rights is also the first and main objective of women's movements.

8.6.1 Women's Struggle and Women's Issues

We have discussed this point earlier. As in the case of India and elsewhere, women played a major role in the liberation struggle of the country. Today women of Bangladesh are protesting over multiple issues. Sometimes these relate to politics, economy, culture and sometimes to problems concerning class and profession.

Think it over 4

How far can democratic rights alone go in creating gender equality? What can be the possible roles of women's movement on this regard?

The women's organisations in Bangladesh have addressed the following issues:

- Equal rights as proclaimed in the Constitution. The government should accord full ratification to the United Nations Convention and take steps to implement it.
- Legal Reform.
- Discrimination in wages of working women, maternity leave, increase in allowance, issuing of appointment letters, compulsory overtime, day-care centres at work places, retrenchment, accommodation, hostel and communication, other trade union related problems.

They have demanded :

- i) acknowledgement of women's labour in agriculture.
- ii) recognition of women's labour in the household in economic terms.

Both women's organisations individually and the United Women's Forum are protesting against family violence, murder, rape, dowry, acid throwing, insecurity, child marriage, use of women as commodity and other aggressions against women. Organisations such as the Nurses Association, the Gynecological Association, Garment Workers Association, Prostitute Parishad are working to achieve their demands which are:

- i) The equal rights of women (social, economic, political, cultural) in all walks of life as ensured in the constitution have to be established legally. It is necessary to amend the laws which are adverse to fundamental constitutional rights.
- ii) Enactment of laws relating to special benefits in employment which will help in raising women's status in society. Direct election should also be introduced in the reserved seats for women in Parliament.
- iii) Attention to be given to women labourers and workers as well as nurses, teachers, office s, clerks, doctors, engineers so that they derive benefits of hostel accommodation, conveyance, maternity leave, house rent etc. There should be equal wages for men and women.

- iv) Use of women as a commodity in the media—films, television, print media—should be stopped. Simultaneously the censorship attempts of reactionary forces should be resisted.
- v) Political parties should have a clear agenda on women and also include more women in decision making.

The women's movement in Bangladesh is also rising voice against the "heinous act of fatwa which has been going on for many years with no governmental actions to impede them". It has also demanded the decree of a family law code "which are all alike to all caste, creed, nationality". The women's movement has also demanded the declaration of every district as a polling area. The reserved seats should be so switched that in the general election women members are nominated directly by the people. In every polling area thereby one would have to give two votes concomitantly. One for the nominee from the general seat and the other for the women's reserved seat.

8.6.2 Struggle For Potable Water

You will recall the problem of drinking water in Nepal and the dismal accounts of little girls carrying water pitchers bigger than them. The same problem exists in Bangladesh. Indeed the problem has been highlighted by women's organisations including the *National Association for Resource Improvement*, (NARI) Bangladesh. In 1993 women in Bangladesh organised a workshop on Women in Environment where they formed a Task Force on Women in Environment. To quote, "we identified water resource as our key concern. We took up the Ganges water sharing problem with India as a common cause of concern". Women, they realised, would be worst affected with a country known as "land of water or better still water in land" fast becoming starved of water.

NARI writes that the objectives of the workshops were not only to define linkages between women, poverty, environment and development, but also a "common desire not only to relate to each other in Bangladesh but also to locate areas of regional co-operation relating to women and environment". The Task force identified water sharing between India and Bangladesh as an important problem and initiated *Women for Water Sharing*. The group expanded further as *People's Initiative for Sharing Water* involved citizen's groups in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

One feature which emerges very strongly from the writings of the women's movement is *the awareness of the role of democratisation in the realisation of women's rights*. The argument put forward is that "the attainment of civil rights is also the first and main objective of women's movements".

8.7 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

We have come to the tail end of this lesson. Many of you may have done the unit on women's movements in India. And even those of you who have not, will probably be more familiar with events in India. To begin with, like the rest of the subcontinent, women's involvement in political movements started with the anti-colonial struggles in the country. In India the nineteenth century social reform movement brought the sad plight of Indian women centre stage. Though for the most part it focussed on the problems of upper caste Hindu women like sati, child marriage, ill-treatment of widows, prohibition of widow remarriage, the movement did draw public attention to women's issues. The nationalist movement in turn inherited these concerns.

Do You Know? 5

A widespread recognition existed that only if women were educated and capable of playing the role of mothers of modern educated Indian citizens, Indian society would progress. It would be wrong however to say that the nationalist movement taught women only to be modern educated wives and mothers. For the greatest contribution of the movement was that it drew women into the public sphere.

Two kinds of mobilisation were taking place. At one level middle class women were being drawn into the nationalist movement. Gandhi's non-co-operation movement itself drew thousands of ordinary women into the streets. On the other hand, peasant and working class women were involved in militant struggles led by the communist movement. And yet again there were tribal and peasant movements at the local level with local organisation and leadership. This process of entry into the public sphere was an irreversible process. Modern India was destined to have the presence of women in the public space, even though in a very limited way. This perhaps accounts for the presence of women prime ministers in the region, though in almost all cases they are from elite and politically high profile families.

8.7.1 Post Independence Activities

In the period after independence there was a relative lull in the movement. A feeling existed that with the installation of an independent government it was time for the development and reconstruction of the nation. The state would now naturally take into account the redressal of woman's problems. But that is not how it was. Just as in Pakistan, many eminent women leaders were involved in the rehabilitation of the large number of refugees. Many involved themselves in development work. Though women's organisations like the *All India Women's Conference (AIWC)* continued, and new organisations, more closely connected to the Communist Party of India, like the *National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)* emerged, the women's movement was not as active as before.

Much of this changed with the sixties. Disenchantment with the process of development led to a whole series of trade union and agricultural movements. Women played an important role in these. The intensification of economic crisis coupled with state action to politically repress agitational movements finally led to the imposition of emergency in 1975. This was a turning point in modern India's history.

A wide spread and broad based movement emerged to resist this violation of the democratic process by the Indian state. Human rights became a major issue. And along with it arose the issue of women's rights. On the one hand older political parties and their women's organisations stepped up their activities. For example the **All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)**, aligned with the Communist Party of India Marxist CPI(M) took a leading role in fighting for women's issues. On the other hand, numerous autonomous women's organisations arose to take women's issues to the streets. A notorious rape case of a girl called Mathura galvanised women's groups throughout the country to cry for justice and demand change in the antiquated rape laws. Along with older issues about equal wages for women workers, maternity leave, conditions of work, familial laws emerged the issue of violence. Even as we write, you would be aware of the case of rape in a hostel within Rajasthan University, the attempt of the political parties to wriggle out of the problem and the determination of the women's movements to fight for justice. The accused is a nephew of a minister and continues to go free. This perhaps just draws your attention to how difficult it is for the women's movement to make society listen.

8.7.2 Role of NGOs'

Often you may have heard that women activists are people who are very elite and distant from the real life of Indians. The truth however is, when the real problems of dowry and bride burning take place, it is the women's movements that take up the fight. Thanks to their efforts, changes have been brought into laws and the institutional arrangement of the state. It is important to realise that a Women's Cell within the police set up has come into existence only because of the pressure of the women's movements.

Just as in the case of the other countries, India too has seen the emergence in recent years of non-voluntary organisations involved in developmental work generally and with women. Often the NGOs and women's organisations come together in joint actions to raise their demands. It is important however for the women's movement not to lose its distinct political identity and become like a non-governmental organisation. While it is important for poor societies like the South Asian countries to have a voluntary sector to attend to the many pressing needs of the people like drinking water, or credit facilities for poor women, it is equally important to have a women's movement with a macro perspective of the many ways in which the international political economy impinges upon the lives of ordinary people in their every day life. To illustrate, it does not suffice that the NGOs provide reproductive health services to women (an agenda set by the international aid organisations). It is equally imperative for a vibrant women's movement to analyse, question and resist the agendas set for our society's problems in general and women's problems in particular by the global economy and by national policies.

Learn from Your Experience 4

Contact those people, especially women who were adults during 1975-77. Was Emergency in any way against gender equality or not? Make some notes in your notebook.

8.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As you go through this unit, one thing that perhaps strikes you is the wide scope of the women's movements. We would like to present before you some of the central characteristics of the contemporary women's movements in South Asia. We sum these up below: The region *inherited a legacy of active involvement of women in the political struggle against colonialism*. A space had been created for middle class women in the public sphere. Along with *the anti-colonial struggle bequeathed to South Asia a tradition of militant working class and peasant movement with a tangible participation of women*. The region also *inherited a culture of progressive movements*, which manifests itself in the women's movements' determination to fight for a secular order. The women's movements share a *broad secular and democratic vision*. They resist the growing strength of religious fundamentalism and ethnic chauvinism. Democracy and equal rights for all, majority or minority are considered necessary vanguards for women's rights. They are conscious of *the need for mutual co-operation and solidarity* between the women's movements of the different countries of the region. Increasingly non-governmental organisations have been taking up projects aimed to ameliorate women's conditions and empower them so that they are able to exercise increasing control over decisions affecting their lives. It is important to reiterate that while co-operation between the NGOs and the women's movement is called for, it is *critical for the civic society in South Asia to allow space for autonomy for the women's movements*. Finally, you must be struck by similarities of the issues taken up by women's movements in India and those in other South Asian countries. These similarities are the basis for joint action and shared agendas among women on the subcontinent.

8.9 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

Autonomy	:	The ability and capacity to function independently without any interference legally or culturally.
Colonial	:	Related to state control and domination of one nation (colonizers) by another (colonized)
Participation	:	Involvement at all levels and in all ways in any on going plan or programme.
Status	:	The prestige and recognition accruing from any particular role or position in the societal structure.

8.10 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Agarwal, Bina (1994) *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Sen, Ilina (1990) *A Space within the Struggle, Women's Participation in People's Movements*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

UNIT 9 GLOBAL DEBATE: ISSUES AND TRENDS

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9.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In this unit we have discussed the various global level debates on gender equality. After you have read this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the major trends of global level debates on gender equality,
- Describe the main themes of the important international conferences on women – the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration,
- Discuss the role of India in Beijing Conference, and
- Discuss the issues and problems of the girl-child of the SAARC countries as reflected in the global debates.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the global debate regarding gender equality. Since the declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year, followed immediately by the Decade For Women, the debate on concepts, methods and issues relating to gender equality are being discussed and lobbied for around the world. The most important manifestation of these debates is seen in the various international conferences on women. Section 2.2 gives a description of these issues. The other two sections 2.3 and 2.4 examine the details of the UN International conferences at Nairobi and Beijing and their outcome. In the latter section, India's role at the Beijing Conference is discussed briefly. In section 2.5 we have discussed the problems of the girl-child at the global and the SAARC level, as the concerns of the girl-child are very much related to those of women.

9.2 GLOBAL EFFORTS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

In this section we will be explaining the global efforts at gender equality especially through various international conferences on women with focus on priority themes.

9.2.1 Initiatives on Gender Equality

Gender equality was established as a fundamental human right, for the first time in the United Nations in 1945. In the context of international human rights, the legal concept of 'gender equality' is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as well as in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). In order to draw attention to the obstacles and discriminations that women face and to bring about changes in these, the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year. The same year it convened the world conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City.

The growing global importance of women's issues led United Nations General Assembly to proclaim 1976-1985 as the 'United Nations Decade for Women : Equality, Development and Peace'. Described as the start of an international effort to right the wrongs of history, the combination of the year (1975) and the decade (1975-1985) succeeded in putting women's concerns, in particular gender equality, full integration in the development process and the promotion of peace, firmly on the global agenda. The Decade for Women had some far reaching concrete results. One was the creation of two UN bodies devoted exclusively to women. These were UNIFEM (United Nations Fund for Women), which funds innovative development activities to benefit women, and INSTRAW (International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) which undertakes research and training activities for the advancement of women. The adoption of CEDAW, (1979) was the next milestone on the road to women's equality. It commits governments to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, June 1996).

The world conference to review and appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women, in Nairobi, in 1985, marked the end of the decade. Since then, the efforts are continuing to mainstream women's issues and make them central to all others at different levels. The various global conferences like the UN conferences on Environment and Development, (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) World Conference on Human Rights, (Vienna, 1993), International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) have integrated the concerns of women into the international agenda as a whole.

9.2.2 International Conferences on Women

A series of world conference on women have been organised by the United Nations. The first was in Mexico City in 1975 where 6000 women participated and associated themselves with the theme of Equality, Development and Peace which were to remain the central theme for all the international conferences on women. This conference produced the first World Plan of Action for the advancement of women. A blueprint for action by governments, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it identified key areas for national action, international cooperation and peace : political participation; education and training; employment; health and nutrition; the family; population; housing; research and the mass media. The second UN International conference was in Copenhagen

in Denmark in 1980, with 8000 women attending it. This conference with the sub-themes, Employment, Health and Education, was held to review and evaluate the progress made in the first half of the Decade. The conference adopted the Programme of Action for the second half of the UN Decade for Women, 1976-85. The third UN International conference, held in Nairobi, in Kenya in 1985 had 15000 participants, and marked the end of the Decade. At the conclusion of the conference all participating governments adopted by consensus, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000, a blueprint for women's future in all realms of life. This identified specific areas for action by governments and the international community to improve the status of women until the year 2000. In 1990, the UN Commission on the Status of Women undertook a five year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. The result was discouraging as the Commission found that the situation of women had deteriorated in many parts of the world especially in the developing countries. It recommended many actions to overcome obstacles to the advancement of women and to achieve gender equality. The Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995 marked the culmination of these efforts. The Conference which began on 4th September, 1995 was preceded by the NGO Forum deliberations in Hourairou from August 30 to September 8, 1995. The massive congregation of women, about 36,000, looked forward to it as a crucial step to Equality, Development and Peace. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies was conducted and the Platform for Action, a blueprint for women's advancement in countries around the world was adopted at the end of the Conference.

9.2.3 Priority Themes for Women: Equality, Development and Peace

The general Assembly of the UN which proclaimed 1975 as International Women's year stipulated that year was to be devoted to intensified action to promote 'equality' between men and women, ensure the integration of women in the development effort and increase the contribution of women to the strengthening of world 'peace'. Thus many participants associated themselves strongly with the theme of Equality, Development and Peace at the 1975 conference. They stressed that these three basic international concerns were inter-related and that progress in one would be inseparable from progress in the other two. Equality is important for development and peace because national and global inequities perpetuate themselves and increase tensions of all types. The Decade for Women (1976-85) subsequently incorporated into its title the themes of Equality, Development and Peace.

Equality is both a goal and a means whereby individuals are accorded equal treatment under the law, and have equal opportunities to enjoy their rights and to develop their potential talents and skill so that they can participate in national, political, economic, social and cultural development and can benefit from its results. For women, equality means the realisation of all those rights that have been denied to them. Development means total development, that is, in all dimensions of human life, as well as the development of the economic and other material resources and the physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of human beings. The role of women in development is directly related to the goal of comprehensive social and economic development and is fundamental to the development of all societies. Peace for women can be maintained not only by the absence of war, violence and hostilities at the national and international levels but also through the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society (The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985: 7-8).

It was decided that the Commission on the Status of Women would designate themes under each of these areas upon which activities for a given year would focus. Priority themes have been enumerated since 1991-96.

Some of these themes in relation to equality are vulnerable women, difference in de jure and de facto right, legal literacy, equal pay for work of equal value, and elimination of gender stereotyping in mass media. For 'development', the themes are: effective integration of women in development policies and planning, women in extreme poverty, promotion of education, literacy and training, and those related to health and nutrition. And finally for 'peace', the themes enumerated are: refugee and displaced women, peace and disarmament, and eradication of violence against women in the family and society (Women : Challenge to the Year 2000, United Nations, New York, 1991: 86-87).

Think it Over!

What was the most important conclusion of the Third International Conference on Women at Nairobi?

What has been the main theme and sub-theme of all the UN International Conferences on Women?

9.3 THE NAIROBI AND THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

In this section we will describe the main document of the Nairobi and the Beijing conferences and discuss India's role in the Beijing Conference.

9.3.1 The Nairobi Conference and the Forward – Looking Strategies

The third UN International Conference at Nairobi, Kenya, held from 15-26 July 1985 marked the end of the 'Decade for Women' and adopted the Nairobi Forward – looking Strategies (FLS) which is discussed in this section.

The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of women during the period from 1986 to the year 2000 identified specific areas for action by governments and the international community to improve the status of women. It speaks of concrete measures to overcome the obstacles to the Decade's goals and objectives for the advancement of women. The FLS reaffirms the international concern regarding the status of women and provide a framework for renewed commitment by the international community to the advancement of women and the elimination of gender-based discrimination.

At the beginning of the decade there was hope that accelerated economic growth and technological development would allow the increased participation of women in the economic and social development of these countries. The FLS notes that these hopes have been belied owing to the persistence and also the aggravation of economic crises, particularly in the developing countries, which have adversely affected the women of those countries. The FLS consists of the review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the realisation of the goals and objectives of the UN Decade for Women and the basic strategies and measures for the implementation of these at the national level.

9.3.2 Objectives of the Beijing Conference

The Beijing Conference, the Fourth in the series, was held in Beijing, China from 4-15 September 1995, and was preceded by the NGO forum deliberations in Hourairou from August 30 to September 8, 1995. The conference had the following objectives:

One, to review and appraise the development of women since 1985, in terms of the objectives of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of women to the year 2000.

Two, to mobilize women and men at both the policy making levels and at the grass roots to achieve these objectives.

Three, to adopt a Platform for Action focusing on critical areas of concern identified as obstacles to the advancement of women in the world.

Four, to determine the priority actions to be taken between 1996-2001 for the advancement of women by the international community including the UN system.

9.3.3 Platform for Action And the Beijing Declaration

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for action were adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women on 15 September 1995.

Do You Know? 1

Critical Areas of Concern

The Draft Platform for Action lists 12 critical areas of concern identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. The platform offers corresponding strategic objectives and actions to be taken by Government, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector for the removal of the existing obstacles. It thus calls upon them to take strategic actions in the following critical areas of concern.

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women.
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services.
- Violence against women.
- The effects of armed and other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation.
- Inequality in economic structures and power in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources.
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels.
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women.
- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women.
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in their access to and participation in all communications systems especially in the media.
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in safeguarding of the environment.
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child. (Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, United Nation, Feb. 1995: 31-155).

The Beijing Declaration states on behalf of all the governments participating in the conference, the determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere. It acknowledges the diverse voices of women, and also that though there has been the progress it has been uneven, with inequalities and obstacles being persistent. The participating members pledged to dedicate themselves to address the constraints and obstacles thus furthering the advancement and improvement of women all over the world. The members reaffirmed their commitment to the equal rights and human dignity of women and men, and to ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child.

The Platform for Action consists of chapters that deal with the Statement, Global Framework, Critical Areas of Concern, the Strategic Objectives and Actions and institutional and financial arrangements. The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward looking Strategies for the advancement of women and removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic social, cultural and political decision-making.

As an agenda for action, the Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle. The Platform for Action emphasises that women share common concerns that can be addressed by working together towards the common goal of gender equality around the world. It respects and values the diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognises that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment. The Platform for Action calls for an immediate and concerted action by all to create a peaceful, just and humane world based on humane rights and fundamental freedoms. This requires a strong commitment on the part of governments, international organisations and institutions at all levels (Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration, UN, Feb., 1996: 1-30).

9.3.4 Country Report of India at the Beijing Conference

The Beijing Conference was organized at the two levels, the government and the NGO, and India's participation in both these was overwhelming and prominent.

A Country Report was prepared by the Government of India and presented at the Beijing Conference. It was based on the contribution from Core Groups and the country wide consultations on various issues. The Country Report covers almost all the important issues related to women like impact of macro-economic policies on women, women in extreme poverty, their contribution to the economy, women in decision-making, their education and health needs, legal aspects, the violence against women, status of women, women's movement and the perspective for the future.

Overall the Country Report outlines, apart from the situation of women in India, the limitations on the part of the government to improve this status and the shift in its approach from the goal of development to that of empowerment of women. In areas relating to women's rights, education, employment and health significant gains have been achieved. The 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 reserved 33 percent seats for women at all levels in rural and urban political local bodies. About 1 million women are estimated to become members and 75,000 chairperson, in the rural areas alone. In spite of these achievements, the Country Report recognises that there are certain crucial areas that call for immediate attention. They are related to the following:

- Inadequacy of institutional mechanism for the advancement of women.
- Persistent and institutional discrimination against the girl-child.

- Feminisation of poverty.
- Gender blindness in macro-economic policies.
- Invisibility of women's contribution to the economy and environmental sustenance.
- Poor participation by women in decision making structures and processes.
- Gender gaps in literacy, education and health.
- Growing trend of violence against women.
- Barriers encountered by women in accessing legal entitlements.
- Gender biased societal norms.
- Negative portrayals and perpetuation of gender stereotypes by mass media.



Campaign for wider social and political participation.

Courtesy : CSR, New Delhi

The reaction of the NGOs to the Indian Country Paper and also of the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration has been open and critical. In India at the NGO level, the initial process was set in motion by the Inter-Agency Facilitating Committee for Beijing (IFCB), a group of bi/multi-lateral donor agencies and international NGOs. The IFCB provided funds for a facility called Coordination Unit (C.U.), Beijing 95, which was specifically focussed on mobilising NGOs for the Beijing Conference. The N.U. set up in December 1993, reached out to the people in far flung areas building upon these meetings to set the agenda for the Beijing Conference. It worked and networked with several NGOs and women's groups (national and regional), generated and mobilized broad based participation and contribution, identified women's concerns and the critical areas that affected their lives in different areas and in different situations. The activities of the C.U. thus included facilitating issue based workshops and seminars, participation of grass roots groups and

NGOs, liaising and networking at various levels, and accessing and disseminating information and materials related to the women's conference.

With the effort of the C.U., a large number of women from India, many of them rural and tribal, participated in the NGO Forum of the Beijing Conference.

Besides C.U., many women's organizations, groups and individuals took the initiative on their own. Some of them were critical of the UN Platform For Action (Draft), of what it mentions but should not have, what it does not mention but should have, and also the areas which needed greater emphasis. Another set of critical issues in preparation for the Beijing Conference was formulated in an alternate paper by seven national women's organizations. This paper entitled Towards Beijing—A perspective from Indian Women's Movement was published prior to the conference. This paper reflects a consensus of opinion among a large number of women's organizations and groups in India on crucial issues of concern. At a Convention held in Delhi February 1995, attended by 200 activities from different parts of the country, the paper was discussed and finalized. This is not a Status paper, but has a limited purpose, that is, to acquaint other movements and organisations working in different countries with some of the concerns of the Indian women's movement. These concerns are:

- Impact of new economic policies or policies of orthodox stabilization and structural adjustment on women
- Women, health and population policies
- Women and education
- Communalism, religious fundamentalism and women
- Violence against women in India
- Women and law
- Women and media
- Women and family
- Political participation of women

Besides these, the paper recommends many things like extension of reservation for women to the parliament level; political parties, trade unions and other organizations must increase women's participation; strict implementation of laws like equal pay for equal work; and right to free and compulsory elementary education till the age of 14 years to be included as a fundamental right (Towards Beijing. A Perspective from the Indian Women's Movement, New Delhi, 1995).

Think it Over 2

Read the section carefully. Is there any comparison in the critical areas of concern as outlined at the international and national levels and those of the government and NGOs?

9.4 THE GIRL CHILD

A discussion on the issue of gender equality is incomplete without focussing on the problems of

the girl child. In this section we discuss global efforts made for children's rights, a situational analysis of the girl child, and the issue of the girl child as understood and undertaken in the SAARC region, with special focus on India.

9.4.1 Global Efforts for Children's Rights

Violation of children's rights is a violation of human rights, and to highlight these the United Nations Commission on Human Rights appointed a special Rapporteur whose task was to gather and analyse facts for the Commission. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are nearly 80 million children under the age of 15 years working as labourers. The number of children under the age of 18 years involved in prostitution exceeds 2 million, 1 million of whom are in Asia. Most of these children used for labour and sexual exploitation are hired, particularly from vulnerable social groups.



Girl Child In India: Carrying too much burden.

Courtesy : Kapil Kumar, IGNOU, New Delhi

The first major step on behalf of children undertaken by the UN was creation of the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF) in December 1946. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and its two International Covenant adopted in 1966, recognized that children's rights need protection. The 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child was the first UN document devoted exclusively to the rights of children. The Declaration of the World Summit for Children in 1990 and the CEDAW in 1975, (endorsed the rights of girls and women to equal opportunities in health, education and employment). The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. It urges that all rights to survival, protection and development should apply equally to every child. The Convention covered the child's right to be free from sexual and economic exploitation, the right to his or her own opinion, the right to education, health care and economic opportunity. By September 1995, 178 countries including India ratified the Convention.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child was established by the Convention as a means of monitoring and aiding governments in bringing their national laws and practices into conformity with the treatise.

9.4.2 The Girl Child – A Situational Analysis

By and large, girls are devalued as human beings from the day they are born, and in many cases even before they are born. Millions of girls are raised in an environment of neglect, overwork and the other abuses, simply because they are female. In many countries girls are fed less than their brothers, forced to work harder, provided less schooling and denied equal access to medical care. They marry earlier and risk their lives due to early and closely spaced pregnancies. A total of 86 million girls (43 million more than boys) have no access to primary school. Approximately 5000 million start primary school, but more than 100 million drop out, 60 percent of these being the girls. Of the world's one billion illiterate adults, two thirds are women. Education is important as women with schooling tend to delay marriage and child-birth and have fewer children. An UN study of 115 countries found that a mother's literacy was more closely correlated with life expectancy at birth than any other factor. It also helps in lowering infant mortality and improving family health.

However, due to the large number of illiterates, lack of awareness and inadequate access to health facilities, girls continue to suffer in great numbers. A study revealed that 57 percent of boys were breast fed, compared with 30 percent of girls. Iron-deficiency anaemia affects between 75-95 percent of girls in Africa. It is responsible for 20 percent of the maternity deaths. Pregnancy related complications are the main cause of death for 15-19 year old girls worldwide, which account for a quarter of the deaths of an estimated 5 lakh women from causes related to pregnancy and child-birth. Ninety-nine percent of these occur in developing countries. Working girls face multiple job related hazards. In match factories in India, girls often begin work at age 5-7 and labour 10-12 hours per day, seven days a week. At least 100 million children worldwide are believed to live at least part of the time on the streets, girls constitute upto 30 percent of street children. Girls who work as domestic servants are extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse by their employers (The Girl Child; for the Beijing Conference, United Nations, New York, May 1995: 1-6).

Learn From Your Experience 1

Collect news items from a national daily on girl child for the last one month. Based on the collected information develop a note on "Girl Child in Contemporary World".

9.4.3 SAARC and the Girl Child

The global commitments on children's rights, especially of the girl child, have been reaffirmed and strengthened by several regional declarations. The South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) SAARC declared 1990 as the 'Year of the Girl Child'. During the year, the seven-nation body of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka focussed on the inferior status of girls in their countries. They shared the growing concern for the survival and over-all development of the girl child in the SAARC Region. The countries formulated programmes to:

- Increase public awareness of the value of the girl child
- Reach girls with basic services for their survival and development
- Ensure their participation in programmes of the child development, health, nutrition and education

- Increase the age of marriage
- Create a positive environment to allow girls to develop into productive and confident young women.

Most of these countries have undertaken substantive research on the girl child and held seminars and workshops to share experiences and plan multi-sectoral strategies, media events, exhibitions, competitions and cultural programmes have increased public awareness. A meeting of South Asian Ministers responsible for women's Development held in Islamabad, Pakistan in June 1990 recommended that 1991-2000 be declared the Decade of the Girl Child. The seven SAARC Heads of State of the governments met at the Summit in Male in Maldives in November 1990 and endorsed the recommendation. They declared 1991-2000 the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (The Child: An Investment in the Future, UNICEF, 1991: 27-28).

In fulfillment of the commitment made by the heads of the government/states of the SAARC countries at Male in 1990, the Government of India had prepared a separate National Plan of Action that drew its inspiration from both the National Policy for Children (1974) and the Plan of the Action on Children (1992). The Plan of Action focuses on three major goals of Survival, Protection and Development of the girl child in India while emphasizing the needs of girl children belonging to special and vulnerable groups and of adolescent girls (National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, 1991-2000 A.D. New Delhi).

9.4.4 The Girl Child in India

Children below the age of 15 years constitute 37 percent of the country's population. The constitution of India has made provisions for protection, development and welfare of children. Article 24 prohibits children's employment in any hazardous occupation, while article 39 (E and F) lays down that the State shall direct its policy towards giving opportunities and facilities to children to develop in a healthy manner. There are various Acts like Juvenile Justice Act, Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, and the Child Marriage (Restraint) Act, which guarantee, to a substantive extent the rights of children. In 1974, the Government of India adopted a national policy for children which lays down that the State shall provide adequate services to all children, before and after birth, and during the growing years for full physical, mental and social development.

Despite all these efforts, the girl-child in India has as yet not been given an equal status and suffers from many discriminations and disadvantages from conception and birth to womanhood.

Approximately one quarter of India's population comprises girls upto the age of 19 years. Every year about 15 million girls are born in India and despite being biologically stronger than boys, almost a quarter of them do not see their 15th birthday. The problems of female foeticide and infanticide are causes for the low sex ratio. Age specific death rates indicate that upto the age of 35 years, more females than males die at every age level (Country Report; the girl child and Adolescent Girl, 1995: 108-144). Early child marriages are common and lead to early pregnancies often much before the girls are physically mature, which in turn lead to a high rate of maternal mortality of 324 per one lakh live births and high infant mortality rate of 80 per thousand live births (1990). The girl child also remain intellectually underdeveloped as she is denied opportunities to attend school. In 1989-90, while the gross enrollment rate of boys at the primary level stood at 115.5, it was only 83.6 for girls, of these, those who manage to enter to formal education, 49.4 percent drop out before they reach class VI and 67.6 percent drop out before they reach class IX (National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, New Delhi, 1991)



Fishing for the family and an uncertain future.

Courtesy : Kapil Kumar, IGNOU, New Delhi

It is estimated that a girl works for 10 hour a day on an average for 315 days a year providing the family an annual labour, which at minimum wage levels would cost approximately Rs. 2200. By the time she ceases to be a child, she has contributed to the family around Rs. 40,000 in economic terms. Despite this contribution she is considered a liability and drain on family resources especially when dowry is paid. Marriage and dowry expenses are among the greatest causes of indebtedness among the poor. Young girls are often victims of rape, incest and molestation. About 25 per cent reported cases of rape are among girls under 16 years of age. Due to economic compulsions, girls are driven to prostitution. Several young girls are forced into beggary and are left to fend for themselves on the streets (India Country Report, Beijing Conference, September 1995: 108-14).

The National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, 1991-2000 A.D. outlined the guiding principles, goals and programmes for the survival, protection and development of the girl child. The plan recognises the rights of the girl child to be free from hunger, illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation (National Plan of Action for SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, 1991-2000 A.D., Government of India, New Delhi, 1992).

Besides this, the central and the state governments have drawn up their own plans for the girl child. It is proposed to expand the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) so as to include adolescent girls. UNICEF has been working since 1949 with the government of India in the areas of children's education, health, sanitation, water, and nutrition (Brochure – UNICEF IN INDIA: A Partnership for Children, New Delhi). UNICEF made disparity reduction a major strategy for the achievement of the goals for children and development in the 90s. It has endorsed the priority focus given to the girl child and recommended that all UNICEF programmes and strategies in the 1990s should especially address the status of the girl child and her needs, particularly in nutrition, health and education, with a view to eliminating gender disparities (The Girl Child: An Investment in Future,

UNICEF, New Delhi, 1991). The Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration adopted by the world conference on women in Beijing also identified the persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child as one of the critical areas of concern (1995: 145-55). The Country Report presented by India in the conference too considered the issue of the girl child and adolescent girls as a crucial one (1995: 108-114). It says, enhancing sensitization to gender issues and promoting a positive image of the girl child and adolescent girls to influence policy makers, planners, administrations and enforcement machinery are important strategies being actively pursued towards securing their holistic development (Ibid, p. 114).

Think it Over 3

- i) Can you make a situational analysis of the girl child in India.
- ii) What are the major concerns for the girl child in India.

9.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this section we have discussed the issue that revolves around the global debate on gender equality. In section 2.2 we have explained the global efforts undertaken in this direction. We have discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the unit, the two most important Conferences at Nairobi (1985), at the Beijing (1995), including India's Country Report in the Beijing Conference. The problems of the girl child and women are taken to be mutually determining and reinforcing. In section 2.5 we have discussed the issue of girl child, considered to be the most critical areas of concern at the global, SAARC and the India levels.

9.6 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

Appraisal	: Valuation.
Blueprint	: Printed plan of a Scheme.
Covenant	: A binding agreement or promise.
Declaration	: Make known formally.
Defacto	: Infact, actual.
Dejure	: By right, according to law.
Endorsement	: Support or approve a claim or statement.
Monitor	: To listen and evaluate a programme.
Platform for Action	: Programme of a group as stated before the conference or meeting.
Strategies	: Skillfully planned measures.

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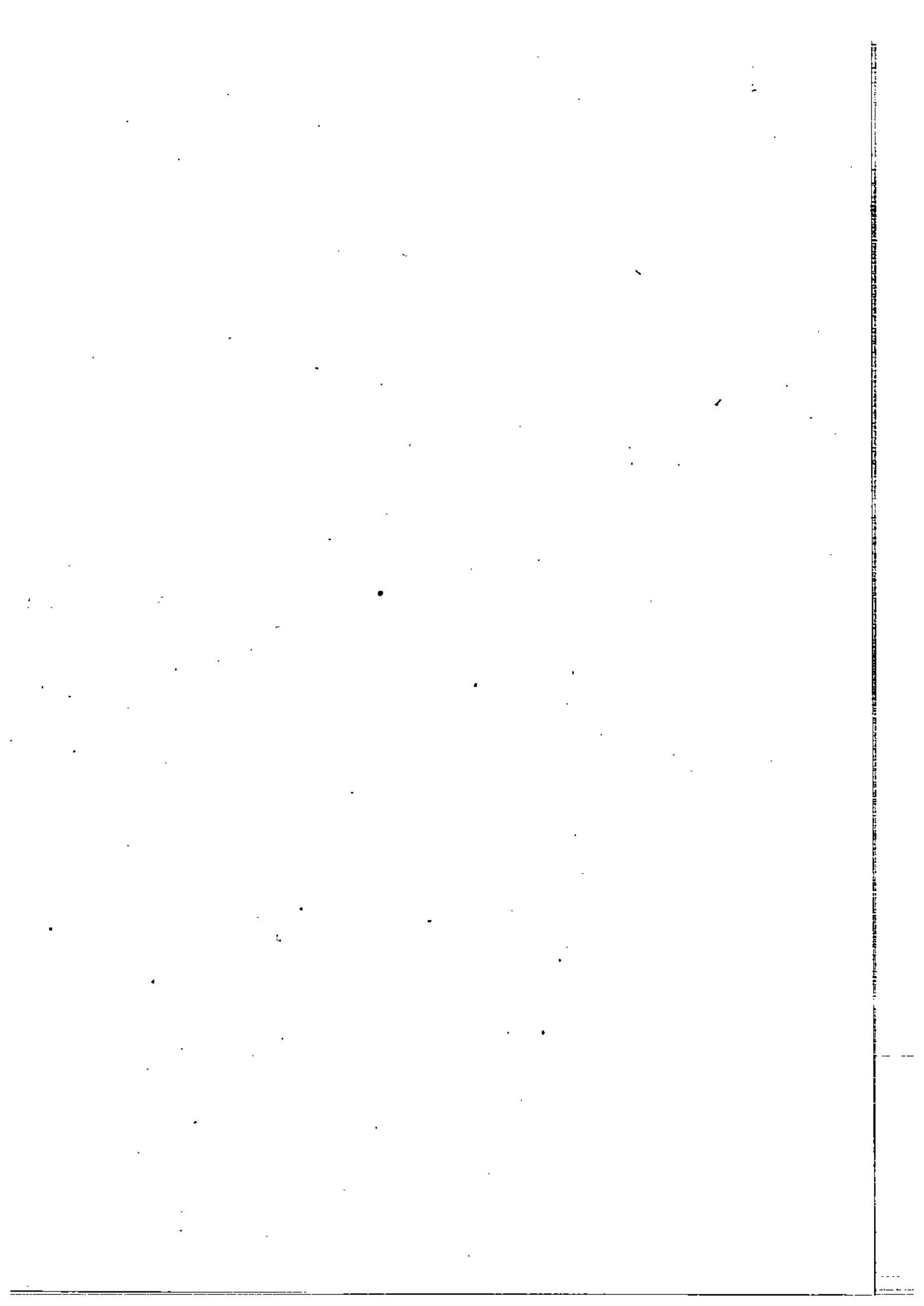
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Foundation Course in
Women's Empowerment
and Development

Block

3

ENABLING WOMEN: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION:

ENABLING WOMEN: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

The earlier two blocks of this foundation course are on 'Social Construction of Gender' and Struggle for Gender Equality. We have tried to show how the idea of woman or her role in society is socially constructed. Behind this social construction is an active role of economic arena. This construction serves as an ideological tool and justification for the continuing subjugation of women. Our second block deals with the various struggles towards Gender Equality. The struggles have brought about a certain difference to the status of women in society. But there have been problems accompanying this struggle all along.

In this block we will look at some of the problems and possible strategies towards a gender equal society.

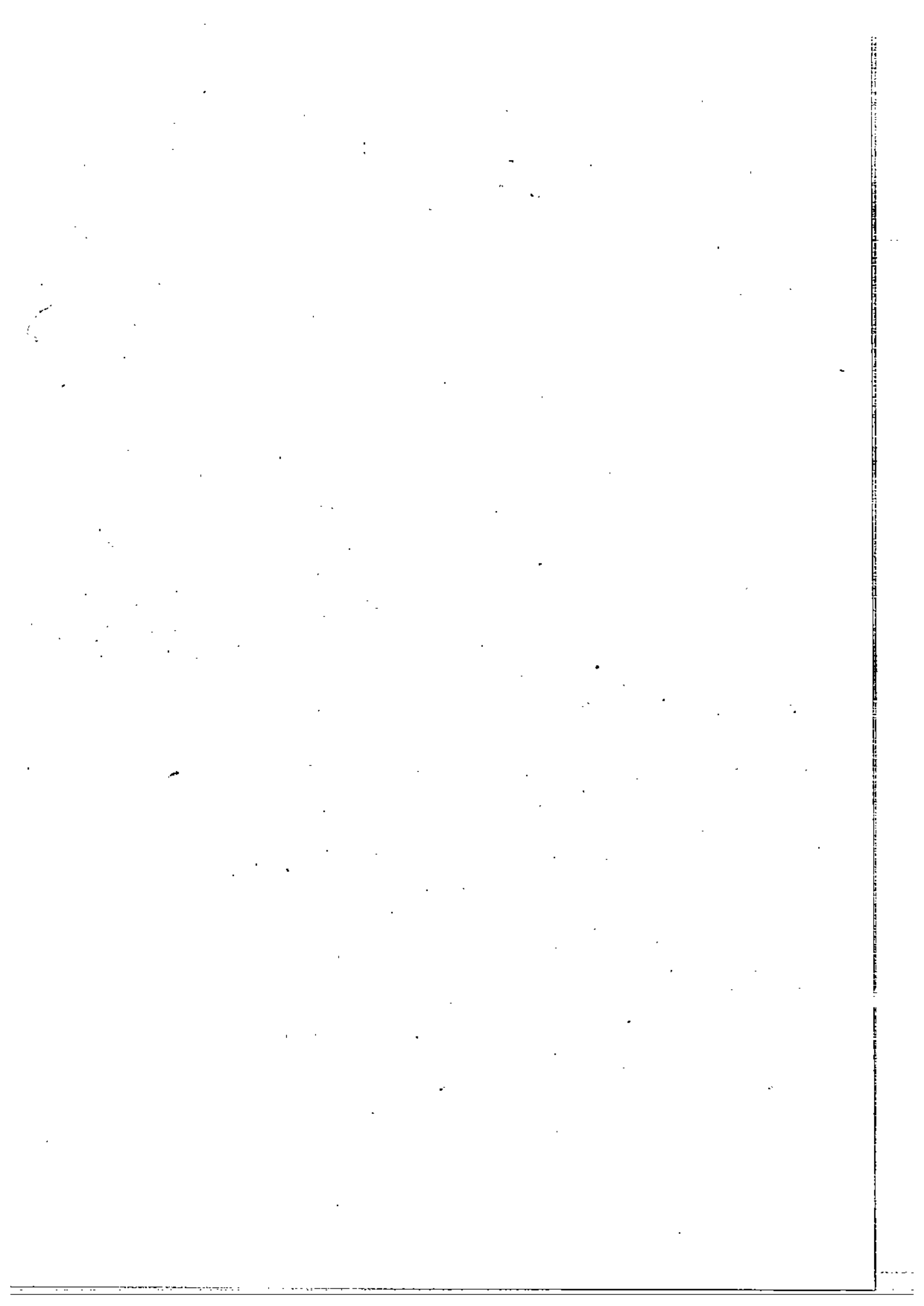
Unit 10: This unit is on Persisting Inequalities: Women's Struggle and State Responses. The area that can be covered under this theme is vast, so we have restricted ourselves to some recent issues such as women's participation in the political struggle. Panchayat Raj Institutions, their problems specific to women, and the possible enabling mechanism are discussed in this unit.

Unit 11: is on Continuing Struggle for Better Laws-I. In this unit we will discuss the various perspectives in women's movements and its influence in bringing about legal justice for women. We also discuss the two major reports on Women's status — The Committee on the Status of Women and the National Perspective Plan.

Unit 12: Continuing Struggle for Better Laws-II. This unit in a way is a continuation of the previous unit. In this we discuss in detail various laws relating to women, both criminal and personal laws. An attempt is made to show how despite various legislation towards gender justice, our laws are far from fair.

Unit 13 is on Economic Resources: Access, Control, Use and Distribution. This unit deals, as the title indicates with women's economic position. Their economic position is determined to a great extent by the social position. We attempt to show how this social situation affects their over all economic situation as well. Some of government institutions and their problems are also discussed.

Unit 14: This unit deals with Education and Health status of women in India. Various indicators on health and education seem to show a relationship between education and health, both of which are dismally low as far as women are concerned, yet again the social situations that women find themselves in, seem to be the main reason for their general educational and health status.



UNIT 10 PERSISTING INEQUALITIES: WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AND STATE RESPONSES

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10.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This is the first unit of the third block of foundation course. We have seen, from our earlier blocks, how behind the deprivation of women is a complex societal process which keeps women in that lowly status. Women have struggled to come out of this marginal position (our block 2 deals with this aspect), but in spite of the struggle, women find that they have long way to go. Block four discusses some of the problems of enabling women. In this unit we would like to discuss how, in spite of various initiatives and interventions on the part of the state, the status of women is far from satisfactory. While there has been a great deal of response to women's question as a whole on the part of the state, in this unit we are going to deal with some specific state responses, and that too in a general way, so as to indicate to you the wider scenario. The essential aim of this unit is to:

- Appraise you of women's condition;
- Discuss the need for a holistic perspective;
- Relate women's issues to various emerging social phenomena and state interventions like the Panchayati Raj Act; and
- Think of possible enabling mechanism.

The purpose of this unit on persisting inequality is essentially to provide the learner with a rudimentary knowledge on some of the issues which make a women's position as dismal as before. New societal

processes have thrown up new kinds of situations which, though may seem secular and liberating, have nevertheless marginalised women's status in society. Knowledge is only half-useful if it is not put to use strategically and situationally. That is one of the main purposes of appraising the women's situation so that a critical understanding of it is sought.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

It is not just reports and studies which reveal that women have a long way to go towards gender equity, instances in our daily encounters show that the oppression women suffer is a reality.

Yes, many women have come a long way from being illiterate housewives, dependent on husband and family to professionals and working women. However, biased perceptions continue, whether in work place, sexual harassment in public transport or the burden of household work. Women still suffer marginalisation in many respects.

This unit will discuss in a very sketchy way, the situation of women, not only in terms of some basic indicators but also in terms of its relation to various larger societal processes, the basic indicator being a reflection of these societal processes. We will be discussing a major state intervention to enlist women to participate in the political process that is the Panchayati Raj act.

In the first section of this unit we would like to look at general status of women through certain basic indicators which help us ascertain the position women occupy in society. Indicators such as access to education, health, mortality fertility etc. show the status of women in purely statistical terms and do not quite indicate the real reasons behind it. The state's response to women's question many times has been purely in terms of understanding women as yet another category, which requires benefits from the government. The need to look at women in a holistic perspective becomes imperative at this state. Thus instead of examining specific governmental programmes for women meant for empowerment, we will look at the role and participation of women in the economy and the polity and the perspective of the state with regard to this area. Our next section therefore discusses the state of the economy and implications for women. In our subsequent unit we will discuss this issue at greater length, here we will keep the discussion at a very general and introductory level. We move then to discuss the role women play in the politics. The recent Panchayati Raj Act has been the most significant step towards greater participation in the political process, taken by the government. We make an attempt to analyse that as critically as possible. The criticism is important to come up with a realistic assessment of women's situation, as well as to work out possible mechanism of enabling women. We have suggested some options among a possibility of variety of options as a way of attending to the women's question. From your life experience of the situations you might come up with more suitable option.

10.2 PERSISTING INEQUALITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

In the eyes of the Indian Constitution, Indian women enjoy the same status as their male counterparts. In reality this is far from true-as-revealed by a pioneering report in 1974 on the status of women in India, and supported by several subsequent studies and reports.

Despite sustained women's movements and sporadic government reassurances through periodic legislations and policies formulated to specifically facilitate women, the condition of women in India is still quite dismal.

10.2.1 Basic Indicators

This dismal state of Indian women becomes clearer when one looks at some basic indicators denoting the status of women. The sex ratio has declined from 972 females per 1000 males in 1901 to 927 in 1991. This, despite the fact that biologically women are more resilient than men, that life expectancy has increased over the years, that crisis management during natural calamities are under greater control, that the general health infrastructure has improved. Female literacy rates at 39.42% are appallingly low as India steps into the 21st century. With an increase of women below the poverty line from 30% in 1947 to 52% in the 50th year of independence, there is an increasing feminisation of poverty. Statistics on violence against women show an alarming rise in rape, child abuse, dowry deaths, domestic violence, female infanticide and foeticide.

Whenever we discuss demographic indicators or when we refer to words such as status of women, we are talking about an objective indication of the position of women in the society and it does not indicate the subjective point of view. "For example as Sharma (1980a) has stressed, in many high status groups, women are proud of their economic and non-economic dependence on men. The less woman is in control of her own life, the greater the prestige she may enjoy. This is partly why several writers have noted a tendency for women in North India to withdraw from the labour force as soon as household economic conditions improve" (Basu, 1992:53).

While it is 'naïve to equate women's perception of happiness or satisfaction with demographic indicators, findings do suggest components of women's position in terms of:

- a) "the extent of exposure to the outside world;
- b) the extent of interaction with the outside world, and in particular, the extent of economic interaction; and
- c) the level of autonomy in decision-making within and outside the household" (Ibid).

All these indicate that in spite of various efforts on the part of women's organisations, state efforts, NGO participation and individual initiatives the status of women is far from improved. There are plenty of legislations, which seek to improve the lot of women. There are various governmental measures too, but the measures taken by the government are not enough. Very often, the government measures are welfarist oriented and have a 'top-down' approach, which doesn't quite involve women in enabling themselves. This kind of attitude, on the part of the government and society at large smacks of a patronizing attitude. While it is true that the government intervention, both in terms of legislation and other measures is extremely faulty. At times inadequacies in the legislations themselves may render them ineffective. Merely formulating a handful of laws and policies is equivalent to providing symptomatic treatment instead of trying to get to the root of the disease and thereby eradicating it.

The status of women in India is a consequence of the social construction of gender. It is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural structures, which define gender roles and domains. If women are empowered, it is necessary to first understand these socio-cultural problems and then identify strategies to resolve them.

10.2.2 Holistic View

For instance, it is not enough to pass anti-female infanticides/foeticide legislations. One has to take a holistic view of the problem. One has to understand diverse factors such as poverty, social norms, which consider a daughter to be a burden, and sons to be an economic investment to counter old age insecurities, which together contribute to the phenomenon.

It therefore follows that while legal and constitutional sanctions are very important they are not enough. In addition to such measures, there is a need to provide women with certain enabling mechanisms which should help them counter gender specific problems and constraints. And equally important is an improved understanding of women which would help the enabling mechanisms to take root.

A very small instance may illustrate this point better. While applying for a government grant for a vocational training programme for poor, rural, illiterate women, the implementing agency asked for a nominal amount to run a creche within the premises. This would enable the women to bring their small children to the training center itself thereby resolving a primary constraint faced by them during similar programmes. Unfortunately the board did not sanction the grant for the creche. As a result, the particular target group could not participate in the programme. Those who did were educated, from well to-do families, semi-urban and unmarried. Most of them took it up as a hobby during the long summer vacation after the class X examination.

This is only one of the many instances which indicate a general apathy towards women's situation. In fact The Sixth Five Year Plan Document which has a chapter on Women and Development acknowledges the Government's failure to secure gender equality. The plan explicitly states that without economic independence equal access to education, skill training and family planning services, the constitution guarantee of equality would remain a myth (quoted in Indu Agnihotri and Veena Mazumdar, 1995:23).

Besides these enabling mechanisms what is really needed is for women to question the very unequal social structures in which they are embedded. We will not go into details of this as yet. We have mentioned earlier the need to view women's situation from an integrated and holistic perspective. In this unit, we are limiting ourselves to some basic broad systems of operation in which we will view women's situation. In our next section we will discuss the ramifications of our economic system on the general situation of women.

10.3 GLOBALISATION AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

We are living in a world, which is largely shrinking into one big global village. Practices, policies and regimes in one part of the globe have a direct and indirect effect on other parts of the globe. These effects also reveal the power politics. In very loose terms force of globalisation can be described as an interconnected world where modern communication plays a major part and where there are greater number of international agencies and institutions, development of standard notions of rights, citizenship etc. And more than anything a more unified economic system. An indication of these is the variety of goods produced elsewhere that are available in the local market. Pepsi or Coca-Cola are found these days even in the remotest of Indian villages, showing that for a multinational companies no boundaries or constraints come in the way. These big multinational companies find their way into local market and erode what little self-sufficiency a small place may have. In the wake of this, traditional economic systems are destroyed.

10.3.1 Liberalisation

In today's environment of globalization and liberalization when the entire economy is in a flux, women perhaps face the greatest challenges. The liberalisation in economic policies, which everyone talks about essentially involves elimination of protective barriers in the name of "competitiveness" and choice. It means greater privatisation and more than anything withdrawal of state from the

social sector programmes like education, health care, children, old people care etc. and women are expected to take up additional burden of providing these services. With rising inflation, mounting unemployment, falling wages and cuts in subsidies on basic goods and public services, poor women face the daily survival crisis in their families. When educational services are cut it is the women who suffer the most. The problems associated with decreasing job opportunities in a shrinking public sector, coupled with intense competition in the private sector are primarily faced by the already disadvantaged sections of society. Women, who are further marginalised by virtue of their gender, face the brunt of it particularly those who are illiterate/semiliterate and/or "technologically" unskilled/semi-skilled.

Learn From Your Experience 1

Do you think the growth of fashion industry has anything to do with globalisation? Go through magazines and newspapers and write a note on what you think of women and fashion industry.

Under these circumstances there is no alternative but to provide women with a platform to articulate their needs, to participate more fully in the democratic processes of the country, to be active partners in the socio-political economic decision making process.

In our next section on political participation, we will try and see how far women have reached in taking part in the decision making process.

10.4 WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The recent furore in parliament over the Women's Bill has exposed the hypocrisy, paranoia and insecurity of our national leaders who appear to be direct perpetrators of male domination. It is true that reservation for women may not be the solution to the problem which is a complex and deep-rooted one, but it is definitely a step towards providing them access to the decision making process. In the face of such opposition it is heartening to note that the newly implemented Act on Panchayati Raj has successfully provided thousands of rural women with the opportunity to be active participants in the political machinery.

10.4.1 Panchayati Raj Act: The Implications

After a checkered history, numerous committees and initial hiccups the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts restructured and reoriented the very concept of grassroot level democracy. The Panchayati Raj Act-as it is more popularly known-broke the traditional norms of the panchayat system and provided mandatory access to the disadvantaged sections of society through an open electoral process. Women were provided with a one third reservation of seats. Each state formulated their own Acts based on this framework. This heralded a potential revolution in the entire social structure of rural India.

Women were finally given the power to blur the dividing line between the male and the female domain. They could now emerge from the "inside" domain and access the "outside" domain to participate with men on equal terms. This was particularly true of north Indian states where the kinship structures lead to greater gender differentials.

10.4.2 Panchayati Raj: The Reality

Panchayat elections have by now taken place in most states. As decreed, one third of the members

elected to Panchayati Raj institutions are women. But has it really changed their lives? Has the Act in one blow managed to overcome gender barriers nurtured by centuries of tradition?

The answer is both "yes" and "no". Yes, women are a part of the elected Panchayati Raj institutions today. Yes, they have emerged from the confines of their homes. Yes, they have a right access to space in the public domain. Yes, they have the opportunity to actively participate in the political process of the country.

Apart from this, very little has changed particularly at the Gram Panchayat level, which is the lowest tier. Women's political participation is still subject to patriarchal dominance, which allows them no right to decision making in any sphere. Men, particularly of the upper castes, continue to control panchayat proceedings.

10.4.3 The Phenomenon of Proxy Candidates

Recent Panchayati elections have thrown up a very interesting section of elected women members who are "proxy" or "dummy" candidates, (which is not an uncommon phenomenon even at the level of higher legislative bodies). When particular seats were earmarked as women's seats, nominations were filed for the mothers, wives, aunts, sisters-in-law of potential male candidates of the area, or more commonly of prior sarpanches and "gram" panches. This helped to keep the control "within the family". Most women asked about the election process declared that the male members of their family had done everything (Sab Kuch To Unhone Hi Kiya-Mujhe Kuch Nahin Pata). This is a common refrain even when asked about the functioning of Panchayats.

Many of the elected women attend Panchayat meetings but always accompanied by some male member of the family. Women, constrained by social norms seldom speak, while the male relatives participate in the meetings. The only role left to women is to sign the minutes register. Extreme cases of non-participation have also been reported where the meetings are held without the elected women, and the register is later brought around for their signature. There are also some unfortunate instances of women who are unaware that they and not their husbands are the elected members. While these are various measures made for a greater participation of women in the decision making process, in reality very few women actually take part in decision making. The age-old tradition of women's role comes in the way of their breaking the social structure.

In our next section we look at some of the various constraints faced by women. But before that let's think over some of the issues or questions raised here.

Think it over 1

- 1) Do you think the state should involve itself in providing some basic amenities like health and education for women? Give reasons if you think so.
- 2) Do you think that the basic perceptions about women need to change before any legislation towards betterment of women are enacted?

10.5 CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN

The greatest obstacle to women's active participation in the decision-making process despite legislative sanction is the social structure itself. Women, constrained by patriarchal system are not

"allowed" to participate as actively as desirable. Let us see how in everyday situation women actually feel constrained by roles that they are expected to perform.

10.5.1 Social Structure

Many women when asked of problems faced by them as new members of panchayat, replied "koi mushkil nahin. Sara kam to pati karta hai" (There is no difficulty. My husband does all the work).

The mandatory practice of a veil or a "ghungat" is a direct result of the social structure and greatly inhibits women from participating more fully.

A parallel trend is noticeable in women's participating in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha, which is an open forum for all members of a village who are eligible for voting, not only provides a platform to discuss relevant issues democratically but also a means to demand answerability from the Panchayat. An active participation of women in such a forum would provide them with the strength to fight the very social structure which chains them.

These social constraints interestingly also significantly determine the demographic composition of panchayat members. For instance it is a very rare occurrence that unmarried women are elected to these posts. While it is true that average age at marriage in rural India is still quite low, it is also true that the father of an unmarried daughter would not like to risk either her or the family's reputation.

Age is another factor, which affects political participation. A slightly older woman with grown up children, the ubiquitous "chachi", enjoys greater freedom than a newly married bride. There are



Shukanya Bai - Sarpanch of Borodia village, M.P.

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

instances where a young bride, reasonably well educated and eager to play a more active role is strongly dissuaded from doing so by her in-laws, and has to be content in letting her husband/father-in-law discharge her duties.

The same social norms allow the "daughter" of a village to enjoy greater freedom than a "daughter-in-law". When a couple of unveiled women were asked the reason, they replied that "Yeh to hamara Peechar hai. Yahan to hame koi rok-tok nahin hai" (this is our natal village there are no inhibitions).

Another product of the social structure is the strongly defined caste system in rural areas. The upper caste males who used to control panchayats are deeply disturbed by the new order and are unwilling to give up their control. Therefore women of lower castes become victims of both gender and caste.

Apart from the social structure, one of the biggest constraints that women face is illiteracy.

10.5.2 Illiteracy

In our country we have, perhaps the largest section of illiterate female population. There has been very little to improve the situation. There are several reasons for the utter dismal state of female literacy, but one of the main reasons for a large portion of illiterate women is a complex net work of societal conceptions about education and women. Most women when asked about the extent of their knowledge ruefully shake their heads and say "Ham to anpad hai hame kuch nahin aata". (We are uneducated. We don't know anything). Education for girls is considered a waste. "pad likh ke kya karegi. Uska kaam tho ghar mei hai" is often the response when asked why the girl children don't go to school. This general attitude is not limited only to lower classes and the uneducated but even the educated and the better off. Even if a women is educated and working, earning a livelihood, she is rarely independent enough to be a part of a decision making, even at home. Often women have the sole burden of working for money as well as attending to domestic duties which is naturally expected to be carried out by the women folk.

Right to education is one of the Directive Principles of our constitution. There have been repeated demands that right to education be made a fundamental right.

A lot of women are also greatly constrained by their domestic duties. Most women find it a problem to leave behind their domestic chores and small babies in order to attend meetings. As a result male members of the household have taken their place.

10.5.3 Economic Constraints

Often economic constraints weigh heavily on the minds of women who have to forgo daily wages if they attend a panchayat meeting. Very few know of the provision of payment to all members for each meeting, even fewer get the payment.

If women manage to overcome all the above constraints they often become victims of rivalry between political parties and vested interest groups. At other times, despite all efforts, they may get bogged down by red tapism, bureaucratic delays, problems of absentee Gram Sevaks or government department etc.

It is therefore, evident that the task of achieving political empowerment for women is an uphill one. There is definitely a need for getting around some of these constraints. In our next sections we would discuss some of the enabling mechanisms. Our discussion is with particular reference to the Panchayati Raj act.

Learn From Your Experience 2

What are the constraints you face as a woman? Give an account from your experience and compare it with others in your study centre.

10.6 ENABLING MECHANISMS

The above discussion clearly shows that legislative provisions are not enough. But the picture is not quite so bleak as it seems. Thousands of women have been elected to the political arena. It is a matter of time before the transition is complete. In order to take full advantage of their duties and discharge their duties with commitment and ease, women need to be equipped with certain enabling mechanisms. They have to be provided with support structures or safety nets, that would help them overcome other problems and function with greater freedom.

10.6.1 The Need for Enabling Mechanisms

The success of those women who have been associated with some NGO, Mahila Mandal, or developmental work, prior to elections is a clear indication of the necessity of providing women with such enabling mechanisms. Wherever such women have been elected to power they are found to be confident and capable of handling their responsibilities. Their previous involvement in activities related to NGOs, Mahila Mandals or some form of developmental work has equipped them with basic skills, which helps them to make a success of work related to Panchayats-despite all odds. They are informed, politically aware, sensitised on various issues of social relevance, have had prior experience of dealing with recalcitrant villagers, and handling government and other officials.

In addition to the privilege of having enjoyed a gestation period of preparedness, such women are also often found to have continued NGO and other institutional support. This greatly contributes towards their strength and effectiveness as political representatives.

The above discussion clearly highlights the nature and extent of "enabling mechanisms" women require to equip them to face, and take on such an immense challenge.

It is also clear that while the continuous enabling mechanisms provided by NGOs facilitate a whole process of change, this may be difficult to replicate for more immediate goals. There is a need to identify alternative and appropriate strategies, which require intensive efforts covering vast sections of women.

10.6.2 Training As a Tool of Enabling Mechanism

In order to generate specific, goal oriented enabling mechanisms for such a target group as this, training may possibly be the ideal recourse.

The government does conduct training programmes for representatives elected to various Panchayati Raj Institutions. But these are mainly for sarpanchs and those at higher levels. The gram/ward panchs are not covered, whereas they face the greatest need for enabling mechanisms. These training programmes are also not gender specific programmes and therefore do not cater to the particular needs of women. These are additionally, "one-time" inputs and most trainees, new to the system, find it a problem to retain everything. Ideally, training programmes should consist of

a series of training workshops with an initial input followed by brief yet comprehensive refresher courses. In short, these should be a continuous enabling mechanism.



Training for Panchayat members.

Courtesy : Asha Misra, Bhopal

The main objective of such training would be capacity building for all elected women representatives. Components of the training programme should ideally include :

- confidence building/mobilisation/motivational training
- information on the Panchayat Act, legalities and procedural intricacies.
- guidelines to deal with officials.
- sensitisation on social issues.
- functional literacy.

Methods to impart the training should be more through audio-visual medium charts/diagrams, puppet shows/plays/songs.

Networking should be established with local NGOs, social activists, teachers etc. who would be able to provide support and guidance during crisis situations.

Apart from targetting elected women representatives, all women comprising the Gram Sabha should be provided with some basic orientation. Reservation of seats in the Panchayati Raj Institutions are by rotation. Tomorrow some from the Gram Sabha would be elected. They need to be prepared in advance.

Do you know? 1

"A major bane of our society is the extremely cumbersome corrupt, top heavy, hierarchial administrative machinery which our rulers inherited from the colonial administrators. A system without resonable checks and accountability. The people have very few ways of seeking redress against the government. Their powerlessness is enhanced by the fact that rules and laws are framed in such a cumbersome way and in such an alien language that ordinary people, especially most women have no chance of comprehending or resisting them. This is one reason why government gets away with without respecting basic human rights' (Madhu Kishwar, 1991: 45)

Targeting the community as a whole is perhaps the most necessary and challenging of all tasks. The community has to be sensitised through short camps and various audio-visual techniques. Slowly this would provide a transition in the basic system and women would no longer be in need of additional enabling mechanisms.

All these effects are necessary if one would like to strive towards bringing women to the forefront and making them true partners in the political process.

Think It Over 2

- 1) In what way does the social position of women in society make it difficult for women to have access to education.
- 2) Even though women are earning money and eking out a livelihood why is it difficult for them to use the money they earn in the way they want to?
- 3) Do you think training for women would help them gain confidence and make them 'come out' of their traditional roles?

10.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this unit on women's struggles and state responses, we have tried to look at the various struggles taken up by women and the response of the state to them and the general perception of the state towards women's question. As we have mentioned earlier, we have not looked at any specific women's struggle but instead tried to see how women are placed in various aspects of our society, such as the political arena or the economic arena, among others. The scenario we have presented is very general and simplistic. In our subsequent units we are going to deal with them in greater detail in our elective courses.

It is very difficult to conclude on as complex a social phenomenon as the subjugated position of women. Nevertheless we can say that the state response to women's problems has been more than nay thing a 'top down' approach, where women were seen as the beneficiaries. This often resulted in a sort of piece meal approach to the whole problem. More importantly, the state was satisfied in attending to women's issues in the public domain as it has left tradition, culture and community to define the private domain of women. Though there have been legislations which have attempted to intervene in these private areas like the age of marriage or dowry and so on, they have been only partially effective. The reasons for that are many. One of them is the state's inability to see that the so-called public and private domains are inter-related, they shape each other, and need to be changed together. In a largely patriarchal society where the public as well as the private

domain are dominated by patriarchal values, any partial attempt to change the lot of women will not take the women's cause far.

In this unit we have discussed the Panchayati Raj Act, as one instance of state response to women's struggle to have a greater participatory role in the political process. The cursory discussion has only revealed to us that as long as the society at large does not attend to women, such an act can only be a partial fulfillment. Though the situation is not all that dismal and legislation has been a catalyst change, a wider perspective is required.

To facilitate this change a lot of support structures are required. In this unit and in the context of the preceding discussion on Panchayati Raj, we are suggesting training as one of the enabling mechanisms to greater participation of women in the Panchayati Raj system. This is only one possible mechanism, each problem has a specific context and particular responses, it is important therefore to keep in mind the specificity of the problem, without losing sight of the very complex societal context in which the problem is located.

The fact that women are still socially and economically vulnerable cannot be ignored. In the present socio-political and economic environment however, access to decision making power enables them, to a great extent, to control their destinies. This may well prove to be the means by which they achieve complete empowerment and equality.

In our next unit we will discuss some of the legislations, constitutional provisions and laws. We will assess these laws as to how far they help women to themselves.

10.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Holistic** : A way of viewing things which takes into consideration different aspects and their inter-relatedness.
- Social Construction** : A construction of an idea, a role of some such thing by a community of people: something which is not naturally given. For example, even the notion of mother though may seem a natural phenomenon, is also a social construction. Different societies prescribe what is expected and not expected of a mother, indicating the differences in such social construction.

10.9 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Committee on the Status of Women in India, (1974) Towards Equality. New Delhi : Govt. of India.

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UNIT 11 CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR BETTER LAWS –1

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11.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In this unit we will discuss some of the enabling mechanisms available in terms of provisions in the Constitution, various legislations, acts and laws.

The aims of this unit are to:

- Appraise you of the background and perspective which shaped the struggle for legal justice;
- Discuss the various provisions available in the constitution with regard to gender justice;
- Critically examine and observe the recommendations of reports on status of women in India;
- Assess what needs to be done to strengthen the laws, as an enabling mechanism.

The purpose of this unit is essentially to critically evaluate the legal provisions, particularly with reference to women's issue so that an assessment of women's situation is made vis-a-vis the legal provisions.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

To protect the interest of those who suffer the most independent India realised the need for legislation to usher in change and for greater equality. To bring about gender equity and to protect women from all kinds of discriminatory practices, our Constitution has sought to ensure equality of opportunity and also justice—socio-economic and political.

Legislation has definitely laid the foundation for legal status of women and has also provided avenues by which women can seek redressal from various discriminatory practices. However many laws relating to women themselves suffer from some inbuilt gender bias and have failed to take into consideration changing social situations. Apart from the fact that the laws itself suffer from this gender bias, while at the same time trying to serve equality for women, they are interpreted in a way that goes against women's interest.

In this unit on continuing struggle for better laws, we will take stock of various laws, their background and their viability in actual practice.

11.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STRUGGLE FOR BETTER LAWS

Whenever a person transgresses or crosses the boundaries of what is decent, ethical or acceptable the person is punished. In smaller older communities punishment was often meted out locally and decided by the entire community, and often the punishment was a social ostracisation. In a modern society where shame as a punishment is less available, and women do not share the same rights and privileges as men within groups, legislation becomes an important avenue to address the oppression on women.

11.2.1 Changing Emphasis in Women's Struggle

Every movement or struggle for equality has an underpinning or a perspective or a view point which guides and gives shape and direction to the struggle. Similarly women's struggles for gender equity have asked for changing perceptions, the roles and identity of women, which are reflected in women's demands, laws and legislation being one of them.

Radha Kumar in her account of women's movement, spanning over nearly a century finds that "the experience of colonial rule was one of the most important formative influences on the feminist movement of the 20th century", and democracy in post Independence India on contemporary feminist struggle (Kumar, 1993:1).

Much of reform movement of the 19th century centred on women's issues. The issues were largely taken up by men. But by late 19th century there was thin trickle of women's participation. And by early 20th century women's own autonomous organisations had come up. In the early period of post-independent India, with the security of the constitutional guarantee of equality there was a bit of lull in women's activism. In the seventies the concept of equality was discovered for what it is – a sham. The seventies and eighties saw a revival of women's activism, which tried to explore wider areas and place women in larger political context. One can see this shift in the way women have been conceived and constructed in all these phases of women's struggle.

11.2.2 Changing Images of Women

Radha Kumar believes, and quite justifiably so, that in the first half of 20th century there was the use of mother as symbol of and metaphor around which women's struggles rallied around. Gandhiji's lauding of mothers for their innate qualities of endurance and suffering was eagerly received by many feminists as expanding and detailing of their self definitions (Ibid: 2). At the same time when it came to the sphere of rights, feminists demanded parity with men. To this extent pre-independence feminists clung with one hand to gender based definition of themselves while reaching with the other for an existence based on equality and sameness rather than complementarity and difference.

Post-Independence contemporary feminism rarely used gender based differences as a point of issue, and based itself on the principle of equality and equal rights. The images which dominated it were of the daughter and the working women.

“The use of the daughter symbol appears specially significant because it moved into a new kind of self exploration, starting from childhood itself. In a series of exhibitions, plays, pamphlets contemporary feminists have emphasized the pain and helplessness of being born a girl, the shock of puberty and associated development of sexual fear; the terrible fear of being sent away at marriage and the repetition of the entire cycle of pain, fear and rejection through the birth of another daughter”. This cry of vulnerability, writes Radha Kumar “brought a new subjectivity into Indian feminism” (Ibid:2).

The image of working women not only looked at productive role of women but also critically looked at gender based sexual divisions of labour. Feminists pointed how it “offered women unequal wages, relegated them to unskilled spheres of work” (Ibid:2), and more than anything it marked the whole area of domestic labour. The seventies feminist movement also realised the innumerable diversities and complexities of women’s situation, divided as they were by different formal structures based on caste, region, religion, tribe etc. This became problematic for women’s movement and their struggle for rights in trying to reach a comprehensive agenda for all women. This continues to haunt women’s struggle in their fight for gender equity.

An important expansion of definition of women’s rights has been the need to have control over one’s own life. Economic or political independence was seen as only one of the many spheres.

A sphere which has hitherto been neglected was brought to fore, control over one’s own body and sexuality. To translate this perspective into laws, legal definitions of crimes relating to women were widened to include family rape and rape of prostitutes.

At the end of this discussion, we can say then that the concerns of women activists and feminists are reflected in women’s campaigns and legalisation being one of them.

11.2.3 Legalisation and Women's Rights

Women, as we noted earlier, have been constantly revising and expanding the ambit of women’s rights. They have realised the need to go beyond legislations and welfarist methods, yet at the same time, there is an increasing dependence on law and state regulations. Though law seems to be a necessary recourse, yet doubts about the nature of legislation and the role of state have formed a kind of constant background and an undercurrent to women’s struggles for rights.

From the early concerns with codification, women have shifted their emphasis on implementation as well. They have also tried addressing the built in biases in laws. The debates on the need for a uniform civil code is still continuing. In an effort to find just laws without incipient biases against minorities, implementation of already existing laws has been very tardy for variety of reasons. Some powerfully connected people manage to slip the not-so-long arm of law, making the weak feel that law is for those who are powerful and those who have access to law. Also in a democracy like our country with its plural multi-cultural set up and various vested interest, the state agencies invariably pamper community demands or vested interests. In their attempt to struggle for better implementation in an already patriarchal system women’s organizations have been asking for women’s presence, whether it is in police, judiciary or other such agencies in various existing bodies. But the danger that has been acutely felt has been the problem of interpretation of law.

As we can see from our discussion in the preceding pages there has been constant struggle by women's organisations and feminists for better laws. As long as women are marginalised, it is only natural that the struggle for gender justice will continue.

In the following sections of this unit we will give you a brief idea of this journey towards equity in terms of not just mere codification of laws but a constant supervision of these laws so that they provide gender justice.

Learn From Your Experience I

Narrate a case, which you have come across or read, where a woman has been fighting a legal case and has come across several hurdles.

In our next section we will have cursory look at the legal status of women as enshrined in our Constitution. We will attempt to critically look at some of these provisions.

1.1.3 THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution of India is the fundamental law of the country. The adoption of the Constitution marks a watershed as far as women's legal status is concerned. The preamble to the Constitution solemnly resolves to secure to all citizens equality of status and opportunity and also justice – social, economic and political.

The Constitution of India attempts to ensure that men and women are treated equally [(Art. 14, 15(1) and Art. 16(2)]. Discrimination on the ground of sex is forbidden regarding the access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment. The Supreme Court held that a rule which debarred married women from being appointed to a post and required her to resign on marriage would be unconstitutional, as no such corresponding bias in the case of men under similar circumstances existed.

The Constitution in spite of this equality clause permits many special provisions for women and children [Art. 15(3)] which will not violate the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Under this Article the 'state' can make special provisions to remove injustice and to improve their status.

Explaining this, late Chief Justice Mukherjee wrote, 'those who are unequal in fact cannot be treated by identical standards. That may be equality in law but it would certainly not be real equality'.

There are various provisions in our laws which provide special protections and facilities for women.

Provisions for reservation of seats for women in local bodies. Under the Factories Act there are provisions which lay down hours of work for women and protect them from hazardous work.

In addition to the Fundamental Rights, there are three women-specific Directive Principles. They deal with equal pay for equal work for both men and women; health and strength of men and women workers, and just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

In addition, the constitutional amendment in 1979 added a chapter on Fundamental Duties and one clause in it was to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [151 A(e)]. Article 44 is another Directive Principle of State Policy which is of great significance to women. Article 44

directs that the State shall endeavor to introduce a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India. But in spite of this constitutional guarantee matters of family law relating to marriage, divorce, maintenance, adoption, custody, guardianship and inheritance are governed on the basis of a particular religion, race, caste, sect or tribe he or she belongs. Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi Laws alike contain provisions highly discriminatory against women. Therefore there is a need for a Uniform Civil Code in the context of gender justice.

For women who constitute almost half the population of India, the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code can provide them with equality and justice in the courts of law.

However, it is one thing to guarantee equality in the Constitution and another thing to make it a social reality. The Indian tradition and culture are so male dominated that women actually live with inequality all their lives.

In our next section, we will discuss the various attempts to secure gender justice. In spite of legislation and gender equality contained in our constitution very little of this actually reaches the disadvantaged women. There are all kinds of problems of implementation, interpretation as well as built in bias in the legislation. In the seventies and eighties a great deal of rethinking has taken place on women's issues.

In our next section, we will look at the critical rethinking in terms of the two reports which came about to show the reality of women's status. Before we go on to the next section let us first think over what we discussed in our earlier section and answer these questions.

Think it Over-1

- 1) State the Constitutional provisions relating to equality?
- 2) What do the three women-specific Directive Principles deal with?
- 3) What is the direction of Article 44?

Two decades after independence there was a lull on women's issue, the first two decades went into crisis management of the new nation. The seventies was the period when there were many agitations against oppression of women. The late seventies saw a growing agitation against crime against women, be it rape, dowry or domestic violence.

11.4 STRUGGLE DURING THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES

During the seventies the publication of the report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India coincided with the United Nations declaration in 1975 as the International Year for Women and the beginning of the International Women's Decade. The Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India (1971-74) covered a wide field, from basic population trends to an evaluation of official policies designed to improve the status of women.

During the Seventh Plan Period, several Committees and Commissions were appointed by the Government to examine the status and role of women in various aspects. The most important were the Committee on the Status of Women in India and the National Perspective Plan.

Almost every single campaign against violence on women in the 1980s resulted in new legislations

aimed at protecting women. The amendment to rape laws enacted in 1983 was the predecessor of all the later amendments. This was followed by the amendments to the dowry legislation by the inclusion of sections 498A and 304B of the Indian Penal Code. Other significant amendments were related to prostitution, indecent representation of women, sati, and sex determination tests. Let's see what the report has to say in the following section.

11.4.1 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women

The Committee in its report entitled "Towards equality" indicated that while development had opened up some new avenues to women, technological changes and the complex process of modernization, urbanization and industrialization have adversely affected women and have intensified the inequalities.

In view of this the Committee made several recommendations for amending the laws relating to marriage, divorce, maintenance and inheritance, for the establishment of family court, for the provision of Uniform Civil Code, and for creating opportunities for economic participation for women. The committee specifically recommended the reservation of seats for women in municipalities and panchayats and the constitution of statutory women panchayats at the village level with autonomy and resources of their own for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children.

They also strongly recommended that political parties should adopt a policy of putting up some percentage of women candidates in the elections to Parliament and State legislatures. The report provided a blue print of action points and national plan of action for women in the areas of health, family planning and nutrition, employment, social welfare and legal status.

11.4.2 The National Perspective Plan

The Perspective Plan for Women is an effort at a long term overall policy for Indian women guided by those constitutional principles and directives relevant to the development process. It is linked to the national targets determined for the end of the century in respect of certain basic indicators especially of health, education and employment. The plan views women not as the weaker segment of society or as passive beneficiaries of the development process, but as having a unique strength for reaching national goals.

The Plan aims at economic development and integration of women into the mainstream of the economy and equity and social justice for all women. Recognising the need for a holistic approach, the Perspective Plan offers several reviews of the situation of women in rural development, employment, supportive services, education, health, legislation, political participation, media and communication and voluntary action, while suggesting interlinked and converging strategies towards holistic development of women by 2000 A.D.

Some of the recommendations are as follows:

- A review of property laws is essential to extend the principles of inheritance to women as they are applicable to men.
- Voluntary organisations and educational institutions should be increasingly motivated to take micro studies and action programme in mobilizing and organizing women and encouraging them to avail of the provisions of various programmes.
- Formulation of a well articulated employment generation and training policy aimed at more

productive participation by women at the same time assuring them greater employment benefits, social security and better working conditions.

- The implementation of the equal remuneration act and other labour and welfare legislation should be routinely evaluated and the findings disseminated.
- The National Housing Policy must pay adequate attention to the special needs and roles of women in the implementation of housing programme.
- Awareness needs to be generated among the masses regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to effectively contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.
- Using amniocentesis for sex-determination tests should be banned.
- Male sterilization needs to be encouraged.
- Both spouses should have joint title to all property acquired by either spouse during the subsistence of a marriage.
- Large numbers of women judges must be appointed to the judiciary and more so in family courts.
- In the Contract Labour Act, 1970, and inter-state Migrant Workman Act, 1979, Provision for crèches to contract labour must be extended to other industries and establishments employing thirty persons.
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and employees State Insurance Act, 1948 should be examined and wherever possible extended to unorganized and agricultural sectors.
- Government should effectively secure participation of women in decision making processes at national, state and local levels.
- In order to change the attitudes towards women and girls and raise the social consciousness of the country, a conscious strategic change is required in national media and communication efforts.
- The National Literacy Mission must involve women's organisations in a big way.

11.4.3 A Brief Look at the Two Reports

The status of women in India did report the timely marginal position of women and the same can be said of National Perspective Plan. Both the reports have come up with several laudable recommendations.

However, the National Perspective Plans fails to take into account the inequalities of caste, community, class and gender which exist in our society, these inequities make access to legal system a lop sided one. The reports fail to offer an alternative as to how the legal system can be made more responsive to the needs of the poor, especially poor women.

The reports do not adequately take into consideration that society is divided into public and private spheres which have legal legitimacy. Thus, many or nearly all matters relating to family are treated as private and are governed by personal law. The family as an institution is based on inequality between sexes (It is not surprising therefore that domestic violence or wife beating is dismissed as a problem of adjustment).

The NPP has been commentating on organized sector work force and not so much on the unorganized sector.

The NPP has recommended setting up a commission for women's rights. A commission is very much welcome but there needs to be implementing mechanism and machinery down to the local level.

In our next section let's see how the 73rd and 74th amendment acts or Panchayati Raj Act have set new tone for empowerment of women.

Think it Over 2

- 1) State some of the observations of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India.
- 2) What are the major recommendations in the National Perspective Plan?
- 3) What are the short-comings of both ?

11.5 WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The nineties have been marked by a new awareness about the need for people's participation in development projects. There is a growing awareness amongst feminist scholars and activists that political participation is not only a pre-condition for women's empowerment but is also necessary to re-orient state policies and programmes towards women's concerns. Reservation of seats for women in the local self-government was seen as a first step towards legitimizing their participation in the formal processes of politics. It is hoped that through such affirmative action programmes, women would not only gain political experience, but would also have a voice in the socio-economic and environmental concerns that affect the community.

Until the 73rd and 74th Amendments and the passing of the Panchayat Raj Bill in April 1993, the number of seats reserved for women was negligible and women were in a minority and in no position to make any impact into the existing political processes.

11.5.1 The 73RD and 74TH Constitutional Amendments

In April 1993, Parliament passed the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in which 33 percent of the seats in local governments were to be reserved for women. The 73rd Amendment refers to the village-area Panchayats and the 74th Amendment to urban-area Municipalities or Nagar Palikas. Articles 243 D and 243 T insert by the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 and the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992, respectively provide that not less than one third of the seats shall be reserved for women in Panchayat and in every Municipality. These articles also provide that from amongst the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes or tribes. The said articles also provide that such seats reserved for women may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies.

By April, 1994, all Indian states had rectified the two amendments.

Maharashtra has adopted a 3-tier system. It comprises of the Gram Panchayat (village council), the Panchayat Samitis (councils representing a cluster of villages) and Zilla Parishad (district level council). In Maharashtra one third of the total number of seats (including the offices of the chairpersons) are reserved for women in all the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj institutions while

another third of the total number of seats are reserved for SC/ST in proportion to their population.

The Maharashtra Act ensures regular and direct elections to these bodies every five years. It authorizes these institutions to formulate and implement development schemes in accordance with the 29 subjects stipulated in the 11th Schedule of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The difference between the Maharashtra Panchayati Raj Act and those of some other states is that in Maharashtra, unlike some other states, the election of the Sarpanch is through indirect elections – by and from amongst the elected members.

In most states, reservation legislation was passed hurriedly without the necessary discussion and debate, resulting in gaps, which need to be addressed. However, wherever elections to the Panchayat Raj institutions were held after April 1993, wards or constituencies have been reserved for women.

It has been observed that many women are not able to play the role they were elected for due to inexperience, male domination and manipulation and lack of information and training. There is a need for appropriate training inputs.

11.5.2 The Constitution, 81ST Amendment Bill, 1996

Having provided reservation for women in Panchayat and the Municipalities, it is now proposed to provide reservation for women on the same lines in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the State by amending the Constitution.

The 81st Amendment Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha in September, 1996, sought to provide reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies of the states.

Due to objections from vested interests, Parliament appointed a Joint Selection Committee to look into the Bill. In December 1996 the Committee recommended that the Bill be passed in its existing form (with some notes of dissent). However the bill has still not been passed. Several women's groups are now lobbying for the passing of the Bill.

Think it Over 3

- 1) How do you think political participation is one of the enabling mechanisms for women. Write briefly.
- 2) What is the 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India?
- 3) What is the objective of the 81st Amendment Bill?

11.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

You have seen how with the changing perspective in women's movement there has been demand for better laws.

There have been several analyses of women's status in India, two of which, we discussed. While there have been many policy measures, recommendations, and various legal avenues available to women in a patriarchal set up, women still find it difficult to find justice. As one mechanism of empowerment there has been a demand for greater participation of women in the political process.

Reservations will not bring about radical changes overnight. But they have been seen as right initiatives towards an overall strategy for development and empowerment. Women in decision making and leadership roles at the grassroots, regional and national levels are major change factors which are leading towards greater participatory democracy, social equity and gender justice.

11.7 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Implementation** : To perform or fulfil a set objective laws.
- Codification** : To establish a system of rules and regulations. It is a collection of laws.
- Interpretation** : To explain the meaning or to translate into familiar terms. In the case of law it is to give a meaning which may not always be what it was originally meant to be.
- Amendment** : An alteration or rectification of a provision in the Constitution or law.

11.8 SOME USEFUL READINGS

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UNIT 12. CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR BETTER LAWS-II

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12.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This unit is a continuation of our previous unit on the continuing struggle for better laws. In this unit we are going to appraise you some specific gender related laws. In our previous unit we talked about the context of making laws and of legislation itself. We have discussed the various problems which plague legislation in general. In a largely patriarchal society it is very difficult for the laws to be effective, besides, enforcement of the laws itself is difficult. In this unit, besides the issue of enforcement for the laws to be effective, let us look at some of the specific laws. The aims of this unit are to:

- Present some of the criminal and personal laws;
- Narrate some of the important judgements; and
- Critically evaluate the existing laws and the gender biases therein.

In attempting to discuss some specific laws, we hope to educate the learner/student about the good and the bad aspects of legislation.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit we discussed women's struggles for legislation and gender justice. In this discussion we attempted to show how legislation is not a simple matter of codification of laws but continuing vigilance about their implementation and interpretation. With the changing perspectives and the expanding ambit of women's issues, laws have also witnessed revisions and new enactments, a point which we discussed in our previous unit. In this unit we are going to talk further about the continuing struggle for better laws in terms of both criminal laws and personal laws. While

providing some basic information on the laws relating to women, we would also discuss some of the basic contradictions and gender biases in some of these laws.

12.2 VARIOUS CRIMINAL LAWS

Crimes are considered to be public wrongs since they harm the entire society and not only the victim of the offence. The basic laws laying down what constitutes as crime and what are the punishments therefore are contained in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the procedure is set out in the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr. Pc) which lays down procedural rules for investigation and trial and the Indian Evidence Act prescribes the rules of evidence to be followed during a trial. Both the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code have made special provisions for women. Significant changes have been brought about in the field of criminal laws. The daily evidence of rising violence against women - harassment, cruelty within the family, which often ends in death - has become the rallying point for women's protest.

12.2.1 Laws Relating to Rape

Let us look at the 'Mathura' case which triggered off a massive reaction from the women's organisations. The case is - *Tikaram vs the State of Maharashtra*. Mathura was a tribal girl of about 14 to 16 years who was called to the police station (an act violative of criminal procedure itself), she was then molested and raped by the constable. The Session Judge rejected her statement of rape. He believed there was a sexual act, but with her consent. He further stated that there was no satisfactory evidence that she was below 16 years, legally accepted as the 'age of consent' for sexual intercourse. The policemen were acquitted but were convicted by the High Court on appeal. They then appealed to the Supreme Court who reversed the judgement and acquitted the constables. The Supreme Court held among other things, that there were no marks of injury and "their absence goes a long way to indicate that the alleged intercourse was peaceful". (Quoted in Women's Movement and the Legal Process, Lotika Sarker, 1995: 6).

An open letter was written by four law teachers to the Chief Justice regretting that this was "an extraordinary decision sacrificing human rights of women under the law and constitution". It further pointed out "no consideration was given to the Socio-Economic status of the victim". The lack of knowledge of legal rights, the age of victim, lack of access to legal services and the fear complex which haunts the poor and the exploited in Indian Police Stations". The letter requested the Court to hear the case by a larger bench and not "snuff out all aspirations for the protection of human rights of millions of Mathuras in the Indian Countryside" (Ibid: 6). An agitation and demonstration followed the open letter and the government was forced to look into the laws of rape.

The law commission incorporated many suggestions of the lawyers and women's organisation. The law was amended, which had remained unchanged since 1860. The concept of 'custodial rape' was introduced.

"Under the Amended law, the offence of rape has been defined as sexual intercourse with a women under any of the following six descriptions:

- i) Against her will.
- ii) Without her consent.
- iii) With her consent, when obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested, in fear of death or of hurt.

- iv) With her consent, the man knows that he is not her husband and her consent is given because she believes that he is her husband.
- v) With her consent because of unsoundness of mind or intoxication; and
- vi) "With or without her consent, when she is under sixteen years or age" (SAARC Guide Book on Women and Development, GOI, 1988).

This means that it is not necessary to prove lack of consent. It is sufficient to show that the woman was threatened or induced to have intercourse.

Under section 376 of the Amended law, the minimum punishment for rape is seven years and the maximum is eleven years.

These amendments can be seen as a great step forward in securing justice for women. But the heavy patriarchal bias is tilted against women. The judicial process itself is too cumbersome and long drawn out to have any potential effect.

Statistics reveal that even after more than a decade of the rape law amendment, very little change for the better has taken place.

12.2.2 Obstacles to Justice

What have been the obstacles? Let's see if we can list out a few out of the many.

- 1) Preventing reporting and registration of complaint by the victim of rape. Very often this is done deliberately by the police.
- 2) Lack of awareness on the part of the victim of rape. "It is at the police station that the victim of rape has to go and it is here that she needs to be told about the necessity of medical examination and what should go into the FIR and what are her rights" (Sarkar, 1995: 7). There are none at the police station who helps to do this.
- 3) The patriarchal biases on the part of the judiciary:
 - The court demonstrated these in several cases. In the case of *State of Maharashtra vs. Prem Chand*, it reduced the punishment of the accused from mandatory 7 years to 5 years. In spite of its view that their should be exemplary punishment' (Ibid: 9).
 - Another very persistent bias which comes through it is that the rape victim is always judged for her conduct. This was evident in the case of Suman Rani whose 'character was considered questionable and of easy virtue with lewd behaviour. Because of the conduct of the victim, the punishment for the accused was reduced from 7 to 5 years.
- 4) Voyeurism and Titillation in Rape Trials: "A slogan was coined during the Mathura Campaign in the early 1980s - Mathura was raped twice, first by police and then by court - it is relevant till now. Very few judgements comment upon the humiliation and indignity faced by a woman in a rape trial" (Mukhopadyay, 1998: 97). In a case where an epilepsy patient was gang raped by five men while she was sleeping; the victim was asked as to which organ is used to copulate, how she felt when accused no 1 inserted his organ, whether she felt the warmth of seminal discharge of all five accused and so on" (Ibid: 97). This only indicates the level to which the court room trials stoop down to.
- 5) The limited range of law relating to rape: the law relating to rape defines rape, strictly in terms of penetration which excludes the very indignity of violence that is committed on women.

- 6) Basic premise governing the criminal legal system is such that the state is the party which is prosecuting and the accused is the defendant. Therefore all advantages go to the accused and the individual is faced with all powerful state machinery.
- 7) Burden of proving the age is important, in rape cases (unless she is below 16) to prove the question of consent. There are many difficulties in proving the age of consent as records are not always available and teenage girls are special victims to this aspect of the law.

These are some of the lacunae and issues that continue to come in the way of women getting justice, and rarely are the accused punished. Violence against women thus seem unabated. Let's have another look at some of the other laws relating to women under criminal law.

Dowry and Dowry Violence

One of the major issues taken up by women's movement in India has been the problem of dowry. Dowry is a common practice in India, it is taken to be so much a part of our tradition, that it is rarely questioned. Do you know that taking of dowry is prohibited in India? The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961. But the Act as such came under scrutiny when there were increasing number of dowry deaths. Women are harassed by the in-laws for demands of dowry, often killing the bride, if she or her family failed to satisfy their demands.

In 1980, with increasing pressure from women organisations a joint committee of both House of Parliament was appointed to look into the working of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. The Law Commission made some suggestions as well. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 was eventually amended in 1985 and in 1986, correspondingly amendments were made to the Indian Penal Code and Evidence Act. "A new offence of "Dowry death" was created by the addition of section 304B in the Indian Penal code which reads:



Street Play - staging protest against violence.

Courtesy : India Today

- a) "304B. Dowry Death - where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise than under normal circumstances within seven years of her marriage and it is shown that soon before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband for, or in connection with, any demand for dowry, such a death shall be called 'dowry death and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death' (taken from SAARC Guide Book on Women in Development, GOI, 1988).

While the amendments are welcome, there are lot of problems with dowry which cannot be solved by the enactment of laws. The amended laws, or the section 304B presumes a dowry death to have been caused by the in-laws of the girls. "This provision undoubtedly is a step forward to deal with social menace, but what detracts its potential effect is the clause that makes it applicable only when there is evidence of cruelty or harassment of the women by her husband or her-in-laws. As this cruelty or harassment is within the house where she is living with husband and/or in laws obviously the only witness will be the ones who have subjected her to such cruelty. They are not likely to offer the evidence which will send them to jail. This was brought out clearly in the observation of the Supreme Court in a case where the young woman had died under circumstances which pointed clearly to it being a dowry death. The court said "it is an offence brutal and barbaric, it is generally committed inside the house and more often with a circumstance to give an impression that it was a suicide death" (Sarkar, 1995: 15).

While at one level the judiciary has been extremely sensitive to the plight of young women harassed by their in-laws, at the same time the judiciary has been unable to shake off the prejudices and biases they have.

Let us have a look at some of the cases here to note the instances of the basic gender bias, - the ambivalence and contradictions.

Sudha Rani Case

Sudha Rani case as it is popularly known or *State (Delhi Administration) vs. Lakshman*, is one case where differences in approach and interpretation by the judiciary are clearly brought out. Sudha Rani was a young girl who was harassed continuously, and subjected to cruelty. One night the neighbours heard her shout "Bachao bachao" and came running to find her burning and the in-laws were all there as passive spectators. She was rushed to the hospital but died after struggling.

In this case the neighbours not only rushed to help but were prepared to give evidence. On the basis of this, the trial judge sentenced the mother-in-law and her two sons of murder. The appropriate punishment in his view for this was death sentence and accordingly he sentenced the three to death.

The case was brought to the High Court on appeal and here the judgement was completely reverse, the judgement had acquitted all three. Totally ignoring the realities the High Court based its judgement on a letter written by Sudha Rani to her sister-in-law to send her mother-in-law as she desires her company. "This letter, according to the High Court, was almost conclusive proof that Sudha had an affectionate mother-in-law, how could such a woman burn her daughter-in-law?" (Ibid).

The judgement created a furore among women's organisation. A number of them joined the appeal and took the case to Supreme Court (the women organisations were made parties to the appeal. The case was also known as Indian Federation of Women Lawyers and others Vs. Smt. Sakuntala and others). Rani Jethmalani, an activist lawyer took charge of the case, the judgement was reversed against the husband and the mother in law, and they were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. The reasons which were given were that the accused

were acquitted once and also there was two years gap since the last judgement.

The vigilance and tenacity shown by women's organisations to seek justice in many of these cases has been commendable and the judiciary reacted positively to such struggles. But even after the sentence was passed, the court couldn't quite keep the patriarchal bias out, this is evident in its concluding observation. According to the court woman "has the greater dose of divinity in her and by her gifted qualities she can protest in the society against evil. To that extent women have special qualities to serve society in due discharge of the social responsibility" (Ibid: 16).

"Apart from displaying a peculiar lapse of memory regarding the conduct of the mother in law. The court also ignored the position of women's organisations. They did not want women to be treated as goddesses, but only demanded implementation of the constitutional mandate, and a recognition that a woman too has rights which cannot be violated" (Ibid.: 17).

What is evident is that the underlying attitude has not really changed as far as women's role in society is concerned and especially on the question of public and private. Thus, though rape, harassment and cruelty or dowry death find place in criminal laws, they are often viewed as family matters which are best left undisturbed or to be reconciliated.

Domestic Violence against women is a case in point where it is generally considered that wife beating is routine and worse a husband has a right to beat the wife. Let's see what the laws have to say on this.

12.2.3 Domestic Violence

Many Western countries have passed laws against domestic violence in 70s. Unfortunately in India domestic violence does not enjoy a special category and it is usually treated as an appendage to dowry. It is assumed that mostly all violence is related to dowry demands, where as in reality with or without the demand for dowry, domestic violence is very rampant.

There are no specific provisions pertaining to violence within the home. The general provisions do not take into account the specific situation women face within the home as against assault by a stranger.

Learn From Your Experience 1

From your own experience or from what you observe around you write briefly about domestic violence and what do you think are the reasons behind this violence on women. Whether it is justified and how do you think the women can cope with violent situations.

However Section 498A within the IPC has sometimes been used by default to apply to situation of domestic violence. The section reads:

"Whoever, being husband or relative of the husband of a woman, subject such woman to cruelty, conduct which is of such a nature as likely to drive the woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall be liable of fine.

Cruelty Means

- a) Any willful conduct which is of such nature as likely to drive the women to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or death whether mental or physical of the

women; or

- b) Harassment of woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security on account of failure by her or any person related to her to meet such a demand.

“so although the aim was to deal with dowry harassment and suicide, explanation a) does not use the word dowry to define cruelty. It also includes mental cruelty. Hence it is wide enough to be used in situations of domestic violence and mental cruelty, where it falls short is by the use of ‘grave’ in explanation (a). This precludes the everyday violence suffered by the majority of women. Even with this limitation, the section can be an effective deterrent to violent husbands” (Mukhopadhyay, 1995: 110).

As we can see from our discussion on laws related to women in the realm of Criminal Laws that these are covered as state and its machinery, be it the police or the judiciary, and it is unable to look at these strictly as legal and constitution mandatory rather than as social issues. The reformist attempts since the 18th century to the 19th century to project women’s issue, not as one economic justice and political necessity but as social continue to influence or dominate the mind of the middle class. Members of the judiciary and police officers are drawn mainly from this section. Cases relating to women continue to be viewed as social and the laws relating to them even when they feature in the Penal Law. Their enforcement therefore can be subordinated to the particular individual’s (judge, jury, police and others) own sense of the social good rather the rule of laws” (Sarkar, 1995 : 21).

These biases are very much inherent in our society and they colour every aspect of justice and its enforcement. The gender biases come even more sharply in the personal laws which relate to women, which we will discuss in our next section. But before we move on to the next section let’s go through some of these questions below.

Think It Over 1

- 1) Why do you think women feel ashamed to talk about an incidence of molestation or rape?
- 2) List out some of the hurdles which come in the way of women seeking justice, specially with reference to criminal laws.
- 3) Do you think there should be special provisions for women in the legal system given their vulnerable situation. Give reasons if you think so.

12.3 PERSONAL LAWS

We discussed in our previous unit how a certain perception about women and their role in society influences even legalization. Not surprisingly therefore all matters relating to family and such other institutions considered private and a matter of tradition, best left with a particular community. That is why we find that every community has their own personal laws, which are full of gender biases. Let us examine some of these laws in the following sub-sections.

12.3.1 Laws Relating to Marriage and Divorce

As we mentioned earlier each community is governed by their own personal laws - laws based on their respective religion and traditions. Let’s have a look at each of these.

Among the Hindu community marriage is considered a sacrament. This means that a wife can not even think of a divorce and she must stay with her husband, whatever be the circumstances.

Fortunately, the law has progressed from this traditional notion. The Hindu marriage Act of 1955 was reformed to some extent and amended to some in 1976.

Under the amended law divorce or dissolution of marriage is possible on the grounds of cruelty, adultery, desertion, converts to other religion, unsoundness of mind, leprosy or missing for seven years or more, non resumption of co-habitation after the decree of restitution of conjugal rights, husband guilty of rape etc (Section 13 of Hindu Marriage Act and Section 27 of the Special Marriage Act).

On a face value it may seem that both husband and wife have a similar position vis-à-vis these laws. But the law is inherently biased against women and this gets reinforced through the interpretation of the judiciary, as we can see in the following, for instance :

- Under the Indian Divorce Act, 1969, the husband can get a divorce, on the grounds of wife's adultery but the wife has an extra burden of proving his adultery, coupled with other offences like cruelty or incestuous adultery of 2 or more years of dissertion.
- The committee on the status of women noted in its report that although bigamy is a criminal offence, it is very wide spread among the Hindu community. The men usually indulge in these practices, as there is a certain level of social acceptance. The wife as an aggrieved party/ person can initiate proceeding against the husband, provided that essential ceremonies of marriage are performed by the bigamous husband. The actual situation however, is different, even without the ceremonies a couple may have de-facto, husband and wife relationship.
- Another provision which has gone against the interest of women is the provision for restitution of conjugal rights. Under this provision when either the husband or wife withdraws from the society of the other, the aggrieved party can get a decree for the restitution of conjugal rights

Although the provision is available for both men and women it is often used by the husband against wife. It has been used by the husbands to deny their wife right to work outside the house. If the wife refuses to give up her job (if she is working) and follow him, if he gets transferred, the court has awarded him the decree for the restitution of conjugal rights. This practical but inevitable consequence of this enforcement of conjugal rights cripple a woman of her independence and any plans of her own.

In 1983, the Andhra Pradesh High Court struck down section 9, of Hindu Marriage which provides for this remedy. Justice P. A. Choudhary's observation was that "by making the remedy of restitution of conjugal rights equally available both to wife and husband, it apparently satisfies the equality test. But equality of the treatment regardless of the inequality of realities is neither justice nor homage to the constitutional principle" (quoted in SAARC Guide Book on Women In Development, Op. Cit.).

It was not long before that the Supreme Court in the judgement of Saroj Rani Vs. Sudharshan Kumar overruled the High Court judgement. According to Supreme Court judgement conjugal right is inherent in the very institution of marriage itself" (Ibid.).

These gender biases are not part of laws relating to Hindu community. They are very much prevalent in the personal laws of other communities.

Under Muslim Personal laws, the husband has a legal right to have four wives. The husband can also unilaterally proclaim divorce on the women. Under the personal laws of Christians, the Christian man can get a divorce on the grounds of adultery but the Christian woman has to club adultery with incest, or with bigamy, or rape or sodomy or bestiality. There is no provision for divorce by natural consent in the Christian personal law.

Now, let's have a look at some other laws in the area of personal laws.

12.3.2 Laws Relating to Succession and Inheritance

The rights of women to inherit property vary from region to region and religion to religion.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 provided equal share to properties of their father. Since it places no restriction on the power of a person to will away his property, many times widows or daughters are left out. The Committee on the Status of Women recommended a restriction on the rights of testation so that legal heirs are not left out.

Section 23 of the Hindu Succession Act relating to the right of inheritance to a dwelling place has also resulted in some discrimination between unmarried, widowed and married daughters. If the Hindu dies and his property includes a dwelling house, the female heir-only unmarried daughter, widowed or separated daughter has a right to residence, but other female member cannot ask for her share in the dwelling, unless the male members choose to divide their share.

Similarly, in the Muslim Personal Law women have some property rights; but not equal rights with their brothers. One feature of Muslim laws which is discriminatory against women is that under the laws of inheritance if there are male heirs and female heirs of the same degree like a son and a daughter the son gets twice the share. Moreover, if a Muslim man dies leaving his daughter as his only close relative, she will be not be allowed to take more than half the property.

Similar biases and gender discriminations are found in the personal laws of other communities.

The Indian Christians of the former princely state of Travancore now forming part of the State of Kerala were governed in matters of succession and inheritance by the Travancore Christian Succession Act, 1916. According to this law, a daughter's right is limited to streedhan, in case she is not given streedhan she is entitled to succeed, but her share is negligible.

This was the law which governed in estate succession in the former state of Travancore in so far as Christian Community was concerned. After independence these princely states ceased to exist and became integral part of the Union of India, and the Kerala state. And former laws of princely states ceased to exist by the virtue of part B states (Laws) Act, 1951. Therefore, the Indian Succession Act, 1925, became applicable in the state of Kerala from April 1957.

Despite these changes, the Travancore Christian Succession Act continued to govern the Christian women's property rights till 1986. This discriminatory provisions of the Travancore Act were challenged violating the right to equality-Art. 14 of the Constitution in the case of *Mary Roy Vs State of Kerala*. The Supreme Court judgement on this was that the succession to Christian intestates would be governed by as provisioned in the Indian Succession Act. Mary Roy case is a landmark case in the sense that it restored the successional rights of women among the Christian communities in the erstwhile Travancore and Cochin states.

12.3 3- Maintenance

In this section, we will look at laws related to matters of marriage, divorce and succession in the matter of maintenance.

Till recently, Indian women of all communities, whether married or divorced, could claim maintenance under section 125 of the criminal procedure code. However with the enactment of Muslim Women's (protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, exempted Muslim men from the provision of Section 125 as far as the divorced wives are concerned. Why were the women from Muslim Communities denied this right to maintenance? We will have a look at the Shahbano Case which triggered a controversy regarding the right of Muslim women to maintenance. But before that let's know what the section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code says on the matter of maintenance. The following category of people can claim maintenance under certain circumstances.

- 1) Wife - who is unable to maintain herself is entitled to maintenance. The term wife includes a divorced woman as well, who has not remarried.
- 2) Child - a minor child, legitimate or illegitimate is entitled to claim maintenance -if unable to maintenance itself.
- 3) Mother - if unable to maintenance is entitled to claim maintenance from her son.

Taking recourse to section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, Shah Bano filed a petition in 1978 at Indore, for Rs. 500 per month. Shah Bano was driven out of her matrimonial home after forty three years of married life. Meanwhile while the application was pending the husband Mohammed then (who is a lawyer by profession) divorced her and argued that since he has divorced Shah Bano, she was no longer entitled to maintenance, as she was no longer his wife. He further added that he already paid maintenance and gave her dower i.e. 'mehr' during the period of Iddat as prescribed by Muslim Personal law. (Iddat here refers to the duration - equivalent to three months or till the delivery of a child in case of pregnant women or the waiting period after which a new marriage is rendered lawful".

In August 1979, the magistrate however sanctioned a sum of Rs. 25 per month as maintenance to Shah Bano. In a revision petition in Madhya Pradesh High Court, the sum of allowance was raised to Rs. 179.20/-.

Against this the husband filed an appeal in Supreme Court saying that he should be exempted from paying this sum as he was governed by Shariat - the Muslim personal law, which states that a man has to pay maintenance to his divorced wife only upto the period of Iddat.

Justice Chandrachud however recognised the rights of Muslim women to maintenance, even if divorced, as she cannot maintain herself. He also held that in case of conflict between personal law and Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code, the latter, which is statutory law, would prevail and be applicable to persons irrespective of their religion.

Religion was however brought into force by the powerful sections of the Muslim community. There was nation wide protest on this judgement of the Supreme Court. It was seen as an interference in personal laws of a community and hence the need to go back to the Shariat laws, as a way to protect the identity of the Muslim community.

The result was that the Rajiv Gandhi government buckled under this pressure and took to enactment of Muslim Women's (protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. According to this new act, the maintenance of divorced Muslim women rests on her parents and relatives, and if they are not able

to provide for her, then she can approach the Muslim Waqf Board. The Waqf is there for religious and charitable purposes.

The enactment of this act is a clear reflection of the fact that women are not treated as individuals, having their human rights, but are subsumed under the ambit of communities and where the communities (whether it is Hindu, Muslim or Christian) do not themselves recognise the human rights of the women, the secular legal provisions are the only recourse for women.

The Continuance of various personal laws which discriminate between men and women violate the Fundamental Rights. The Preamble to the Constitution, the Indian Constitution promises that the state "shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India". The state, in its enactment of the Muslim Women (protection of Rights on divorce) Act, in fact exhibit a total lack of commitment to the women's issue and to the principles and ideals of Constitution.

12.4 THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

As mentioned earlier, the Constitution of India provides for a Uniform Civil Code in Article 44, which is one of the directive principles of State Policy considered fundamental to the governance of the country. But, whenever there is an attempt towards the Uniform Civil Code, either the interests of the minority is talked about, or it becomes an issue of minority baiting and anti-minority propoganda. The interest of fifty percent of the population and their rights are being ignored because men on each side are less concerned with gender justice and more with competitive community identity, while, the minorities put on the defensive because of the communal atmosphere. Even if we have to accept a plurality of legal systems, there should be a legal code which takes into consideration the human rights of people, especially the women. At present many women's groups are trying to find solutions and there is an active debate on this issue. Many groups feel that it has become more difficult to discuss gender justice in the present communal atmosphere and women will have to unite across religious divisions in order to solve problems that are common to them all.

Think it Over 2

- 1) What do Personal Laws deal with?
- 2) Give some instances of gender bias in the personal Laws.

12.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Law is an instrument of social change. Admittedly, it is powerful as a legitimate means of challenging behaviour but it cannot be used alone to change the patriarchal character of the society. Every 'actor' is from the very same patriarchal society. Therefore constitutional and legal frameworks of equality can convert women's historically disadvantaged position into one of equality, of equal participation.

Implementation of the various laws is very poor because the enforcers and the implementers of laws need to be sensitized about the intent and spirit of the law. The women themselves should be aware of their rights and duties. The awareness will lead to empowerment and also contribute towards the struggle for better laws and more efficient implementation of laws.

The feminist movement has been one of the most significant social movements of contemporary times to have challenged and demanded changes in the existing distribution of rights, resources and opportunities. The concept of gender justice is now increasingly being brought to the fore. It is now believed that the observable sexual asymmetry is not, a necessary condition of human societies, rather it is a cultural product, open to change. Therefore gender sensitization and gender training is being increasingly used as a strategy to bring about change along with law.

12.6 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

Accused	: To bring a charge against a person for breaking the law.
Acquitted	: To declare a person (accused of crime), not guilty and innocent.
Amendment	: To make changes or revise a legislation or law.
Appeal	: To make a request to a higher court for the rehearing of a case.
Aggrieved	: To injure a person in the sense of their legal rights.
Bigamy	: The crime of marrying a second time while a previous marriage is still legally in effect.
Convicted	: To prove or find a person guilty.
Decree	: Any official order or division.
Intestate	: A person who dies without having made a will - having died intestate.
Testation	: A legally valid will.
Upheld	: To confirm, or sustain.

12.7 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Tiwari, Y.K. (1991) *Status of Hindu Women and Efficacy of Protective Legislation*.

Flavia, Agnes (1995) *State Gender and the Rhetoric of Law Reform*. Mumbai: S.N.D.T. Women's University.

UNIT 13 ECONOMIC RESOURCES: ACCESS, CONTROL, USE AND DISTRIBUTION

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13.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

The position that women enjoy in society is very much related to their economic status. In this unit on access, control, use and distribution of economic resources we will discuss the role of women in relation to one of the most important resources—the economic resource. The aim of this unit is to :

- appraise the economic status of women;
- evaluate their work participation;
- examine the linkages between their economic and social status; and
- critically look at some governmental and other initiatives.

Through the above mentioned discussion points, we hope the reader will be able to understand the larger significance of why women are in such a marginal condition. Our purpose is to not only provide you with information but to give you an overview which will help you analyse the situation more critically.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The status of any given society or a community is intimately connected to the economic position that it enjoys. The economic position in turn depends on rights, privileges and participation in economic activities.

Women have been relegated to a marginal position in society and this position is reflected in the economic sphere too. It is true that traditionally women were equal participants in economic activity, especially in agricultural societies and small societies, particularly among lower castes. However the work that women engage in has largely been traditional, semi-skilled or simply work which was associated with the fact that they were women. So, cooking and other household activities including raising children are taken to be women's job. Since these jobs do not involve any economic calculation in terms of monetary value, they are often seen as unworthy or not important enough to enjoy a place of pride.

In a society which is moving in to non-traditional modes, women with their lack of exposure, education, skills and the support of the family and the community have very little to contribute in the work force.

The need for equality of rights and opportunities for economic participation has long been recognised. 'The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to house work which is private. As long as the public and private realm are divided into mutually exclusive domains, where the public domain has a recognition valuation and the private realm to a non-productive area, women's contribution to economy is unrecognised. In this unit we will take a quick look at the economic position that women occupy in our society.

To start with we will look at the status of women, their access and control over resources, and the link between the social position that they have in family and in the wider society. We would also like to discuss various government responses and initiatives, and the work of NGOs, and important actors or agencies who are involved in an effort to attend to the problem of economic marginalisation.

13.2 STATUS OF WOMEN: THE VALUE OF WORK PRODUCTIVITY

Economic Access may be defined in its simplest form as "who gets what". The social construction of gender not only defines the roles of men and women in society, it also determines the nature and extent of the access that men and women have to all resources.

It has been extensively discussed in the previous units that women are disadvantaged from birth by virtue of their gender. This is primarily a manifestation of the social definition of gender and the status of women therein. As a result, women are denied access to economic resources in addition to other basic resources such as education, health etc.

13.2.1 Women's Work

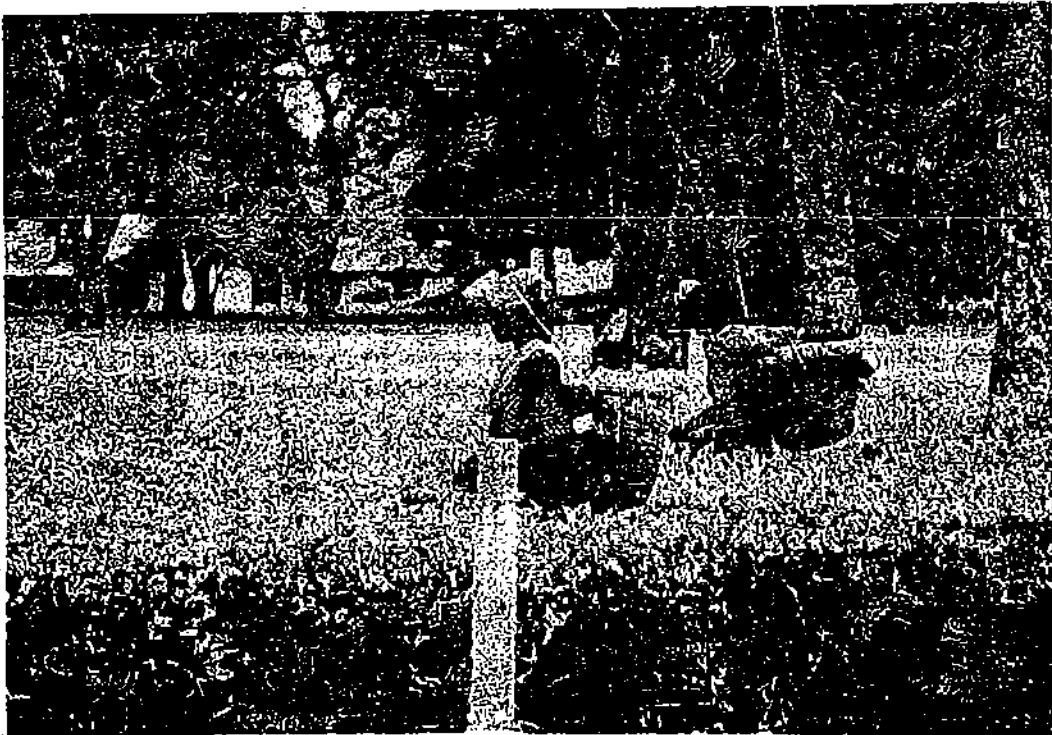
At this juncture, it is extremely important to point out the fundamental differences or the gap between women's access to economic resources and their productivity. The vital role of women in the Indian labour force and their contribution to the national economy has been established beyond doubt. It would not be an exaggeration to state that women are the backbone of the economy.

Yet, unfortunately women have not enjoyed proper recognition for their contribution to the economy. Since a large part of women's activities show no tangible economic returns, their contribution to the economy has been largely ignored. An ILO study has estimated that the value of unpaid household work constitutes 25-39% of the total Gross National Product (GNP) in developing countries. Women play important role in agricultural production, animal husbandry and other related activities such

as storage, marketing of produce, food processing etc. Apart from these they spend almost 10-12 hours per day doing house work and related activities. Some of the most common activities that women are engaged in, on a daily basis, include domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, spending hours gathering firewood, walking long distances to collect potable water, tending the cattle, working on the land owned by the family, tailoring, weaving and taking care of the children. None of the above-mentioned activities show tangible economic returns. Consequently, they are difficult to quantify and therefore ignored. It is only recently, after a number of reports, studies, by women's activists and advocacy groups have come up with alternative methods of "measuring" this contribution, that awareness on the issue has emerged, but very little is being done.

13.2.2 Access to Economic Resources

This lack of statistical recognition of women's work is not only unfortunate in itself, it compounds the more basic problems women face viz. lack of access to economic resources. Women, throughout their lifetime, are denied the right to access - let alone control over economic resources. In a predominantly patriarchal set up where men are reluctant to give up control of the reins of economic power, women remain dependent on their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons throughout their lives. Apart from a few matrilineal castes/clans in southern India, the traditional patrilineal transmission of property ensures that *women have little or no access to ownership of land or other productive assets* either in their natal homes or in the family they marry into.



Women in plantations - a source of cheap labour,

Courtesy : Kapil Kumar, IGNOU, New Delhi

The present social norms decree that while a son is the best potential "old age investment", a daughter is a burden who will "belong to another family", carrying with her a substantial portion of wealth in the form of dowry. No importance is given to the immense share of domestic chores that the female child takes on before marriage – taking care of siblings, helping their mothers in cooking and cleaning, grazing cattle – which again bring no tangible economic gains to the family. Once married, her identity revolves around the number of surviving sons she has. This however does not provide her access to economic assets. In her old age she is dependent on her sons for maintenance. If a woman is unfortunate enough to be widowed without a male offspring, and if both her in-laws and her own family deny her shelter, she has very few options except to move from one miserable existence to another, or in the case of extreme desperation, take her own life.

The example cited above may be of an extreme nature but it highlights the necessity for a woman to have access to economic resources. Access to economic resources not only facilitates her to be self-reliant in case of emergencies, it provides her with the means to be economically independent throughout her life.

A significant segment of access to economic resources includes access to income in monetary terms. A lot of women do not automatically get control of their income. However, it does increase their importance within the family and helps them obtain a foothold in the hierarchical power structure within the family. Relatively speaking, their status improves and they enjoy more autonomy and bargaining power within the family. They often gain a hitherto denied right to make decisions on issues like marriage, children's education, utilization and allocation of family resources etc.

Apart from increased decision making power, access to monetary income has other benefits as well. In case a woman does have control over her income, it has been documented that her income is predominantly utilised for the welfare of her family – such as nutrition, health and education. This ensures a better quality of life for her family members.

If the source of a woman's income is through employment, she also gains exposure to the world outside. Interaction with other people contributes towards a broadening of perspectives, a better understanding of problems. Together these help in enlarging her information base – particularly on her rights and in evaluating her own situation.

13.2.3 Inside and Outside

One cannot, however, discuss women's access to economic resources – or lack of it – without mentioning the "inside/outside" dichotomy. Social norms define the physical domains of movement for men and women. While women are confined to the "inside" domain, men enjoy the freedom of the "outside" domain. This initiates the fundamental barrier to women obtaining gainful employment. There is of course no objection to their performing unpaid family labour. This does however differ according to the caste, class, and particularly the economic status of the family. Poor families who cannot afford the luxury of female seclusion allow their women to enter the labour force. It is true that most of these women find their way into the unorganized sector – as construction labourers, beedi workers, bangle makers, vegetable vendors, fish mongers, domestic servants etc. They are plagued by various problems typical to the unorganised sector such as exploitation, obtaining minimum wages, and occupational health hazards. Despite problems, these women often enjoy more direct access to their scanty economic resources than their better-off counterparts who do not. The overriding control of social norms however, is best illustrated by the fact that withdrawal of women from the labour force remains one of the most important symbols of the high economic and social status of a family.

Learn From Your Experience 1

You must have come across local vegetable vendors or a small shop owners who are women. Find out from them the resistance that they have faced, as well as the support they had in trying to run or establish that small business.

Think it Over 1

- 1) Do you think there is any justification in denying women the right to inherit property?
- 2) What do you think are the reasons which keep a woman primarily engaged in her domestic chores

13.3 ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

In the first twenty years of independence, policy makers were primarily concerned with overall economic growth. Gender issues were subsumed by poverty related concerns.

The Constitution of India provides for equal rights and privileges for both men and women and makes special provisions for women, given the low status, for an equitable place in society. A number of enactments and legislations have been passed to remove the constraints which women face. But can we really say that the lot of women has improved? Certainly not, various human development indicators show that women are far behind men, whether it is in education, employment, or health.

It was taken that any social welfare measure must come from the government as well as the major policy decisions. These policy implementations generally were made without consulting the women. While at one level government propaganda states that they are committed to women's rights, at another level, there is a continuous marginalisation of their participation in decision making process. However, the state has been one of the key agencies for the execution of laws and its enactments. Let us have a brief look at some government efforts on the issue of women's participation in the economy.

13.3.1 Government Programmes for Women

Government Programmes for women's development in India began as early as 1954 but were conceived in the traditional framework – focussing on motherhood and family care roles. The shift of focus from social welfare to encouraging full participation of women in mainstream economic activities began with the 1974 report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. It was only in the 1980s that the government began to acknowledge that women constitute not just a segment but the core of India's poor. Therefore women required specially designed programmes – sensitive to their particular needs. In recognition of this, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) targeted women with both mainstream poverty alleviation programmes (for example the Integrated Rural Development Programme or IRDP) and programme specifically designed for them (for example Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas or DWCRA).

In 1985, a separate department looking after women and Child Development was formed within the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Several schemes – both economic and welfare have been set up by them. They were active participants in the 11th world conference on women held at Beijing in 1995 where they presented a fairly progressive and ambitious Country Paper.

One cannot fault the government on its efforts-albeit late – in the field of women's development. Unfortunately the results of these efforts remain inadequate to say the least. Despite several success stories, there appears to be a vast gap between the conceptualisation of the programmes and their implementation at the grassroots level. They are plagued by various problems which include bureaucratic delays and red-tapism, inadequate coverage of remote areas, misidentification of beneficiaries, absence of linkages needed to make an economic activity successful, failure to provide support systems specific to women's needs, misuse of funds by vested interest groups etc.

13.3.2 Safety Mechanisms

In order to circumvent some of these logistical problems, the government needs to evolve certain strategies, certain safety mechanisms.

One of the basic steps the government needs to take is to initiate an accurate valuation of women's work participation. It is necessary to generate and maintain a reliable database of women's economic contribution. This will serve a dual purpose. It will provide an assessment of women's contribution to the national economy as well as improve their status. Such a database would also assist academicians and planners to formulate appropriately designed and gender sensitive economic programmes for disadvantaged women.

The government needs to have an efficient monitoring system to ensure optimal implementation of their existing programmes. Monitoring units may be set up for this purpose, at the central level as well as the state level. External reviews should also be conducted from time to time for greater transparency. Strengthening the monitoring system will facilitate a feedback process necessary for the regeneration of schemes – which may need to be modified for local/specific requirements. This will also help in increasing accountability amongst government officials and implementing agencies – thereby reducing opportunities of corruption in the system.

A lot of women who have the potential to be economically independent – either as beneficiaries of government economic programmes or as individual entrepreneurs – suffer from a lack of credit facilities. They are more often than not, at the mercy of moneylenders who demand high rates of interest, on the one hand, and of insensitive bank and government officials on the other. They need to be provided with easy access to credit facilities. For this purpose a dissemination of information is essential. Simultaneous sensitization of bank and government officials is also required.

The government also has to recognize the need to provide support systems specific to women's needs – such as crèches/day care centres, access to improved household technologies, working women's hostels etc. Without these basic support systems it would be difficult for women to attain optimum levels of productivity.

Another step falling within the government's purview is in devising of legislative measures, which would ensure protection to, employed women – particularly large sections of disadvantaged women in the unorganized sector. This provision is mere enough – as is evident from those which already exist and are not followed. A proper and adequate measure for their implementation is mandatory.

Think it Over?

- 1) What is the basic flaw in the government's approach to their developmental schemes for women?
- 2) What are the social hurdles that a woman entrepreneur is likely to come across?
- 3) Do you think that the state has any role in the general enabling process of women?

13.4 VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES

In the wake of the 1974 report on the status of women in India and the National Perspective Plan later, the government introduced vocational training programmes in order to equip disadvantaged women with skills necessary for achieving economic independence.

As in the case of other government programmes, these too suffered from faulty implementation. As a result, they failed to attain the desired goals. This becomes clearer when illustrated by the outcome of the vocational training programmes implemented by the government. Conceptualised as a training cum employment programme, it attempts to provide women from disadvantaged sections of society access to non-traditional skills and facilitate them to obtain economic self sustainability. Although the programme has been largely successful, particularly in its coverage of beneficiaries and skills, certain drawbacks – both in programme management at the central government level and in project implementation at the implementing organization's level – have hampered the programme from achieving its potential. These problems are however not insurmountable with a little more planning and monitoring.

13.4.1 Dissemination of Information

One of the most basic problems of the programme is the inadequate dissemination of information on the programme guidelines to the Implementing Organisations (IOs). Consequently the IOs are often unaware of the requirements of the programme. For instance most of them do not know that the guidelines stipulate a minimum wage of at least Rs. 600/- per month for the trainees in the post training period.

Delays, particularly in the disbursement of the second instalment, created great problems for the IOs. There are instances where the second instalments have not yet been disbursed despite the fact that the project has been completed over two years ago. In many cases the IOs are small NGOs who do not have the infrastructure and capital necessary to cushion such delays. As a result the project suffers.

In addition to the guidelines being made available to the IOs, they should be invited to orientation workshops where further clarifications can be made.

13.4.2 Project Sanction

Another drawback in the critical area of project sanction often ruins the entire project. It has frequently been seen that the government makes budgetary and durational cuts while sanctioning a project. As long as these cuts do not affect the essence of the project, they do not matter. Often however the project is rendered unfeasible due to arbitrary cuts. For instance, one cannot run a tailoring course if sewing machines are not sanctioned. Each project should be examined on its individual merit keeping in mind the needs of the specific target group. In a project for basket weaving, the training time was reduced from 12 to 3 months. The women being illiterate, were unable to remember various calculations necessary for the intricate designs. The products they made at the end of 3 months were not marketable. The 5 star hotel which had promised to buy the products, rejected them. The women returned to household and agricultural work.

Once a project is sanctioned, delays in disbursement of funds should be avoided as far as possible. In the case of the programme monitoring system, a number of avoidable problems remain unsolved. Let alone an efficient monitoring system, there is not even an efficient filing systems. Records are

often dated and new addresses, phone numbers and contact persons not incorporated. Using computers to store the information would be an invaluable effort. It would serve the dual purpose of maintaining updated records as well as storing and categorising information on monitoring efforts to facilitate a feedback system.

13.4.3 Monitoring

An efficient monitoring system would be able to prevent the possible misuse of funds. It would also be able to provide additional inputs wherever required.

Apart from these problems in programme management at the central government level, there are certain drawbacks at the IO level. The most common and recurring problem is the inability of IOs to gauge market needs and establish linkages necessary for the sustainability of the project. This is more common in the case of small NGOs who do not have access to enough exposure and experience.

Trainees of PSUS usually obtain jobs within the unit itself. PSUS are however often found lacking in a gender sensitive approach which is essential for such a vulnerable target group. A number of NGOs may not be able to ensure very high wages to the trainees in the post training period but they provide a number of valuable additional inputs such as functional literacy, counselling, health care, and support services like creches, shelter homes, placements etc. The Government should identify sincere NGOs and provide them with infrastructural support.

13.4.4 Market

It is absolutely essential to conduct a market survey prior to selection of the skill in order to assess its demand. For instance local demand for woollen garments would be much higher in northern India with its severe winters, than in the warmer climate of southern India.

It is also necessary to establish market linkages in order to ensure the women sustainable economic activity after the training period. There are instances where two IOs implementing identical skills have differing levels of success because of market linkages or the lack of such linkage.

Closely associated with market demand is the concept of design input – particularly for training centered around products. For instance, if the project is on training women in garments for export – it is mandatory to introduce designing and quality control. The government at the time of sanction should take these elements into consideration.

13.4.5 Linkages

Often, small NGOs are found to be in need of infrastructural support – particularly in the case of delayed funds, or in access to information on markets, designing, other funds etc. Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are better able to overcome some of these hurdles wherever necessary. They can also start "social marketing" by buying the products of these trainees for their offices etc.

The government should also assist in establishing linkages with other government run schemes such as exhibition facilities, credit facilities etc. One of the most common problems faced by women in the post training period is lack of access to credit facilities – both as individual entrepreneurs and producer groups. They are unable to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty and middlemen. The government should facilitate linkages with schemes such as the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh etc.

It therefore emerges that with proper planning, foresight, monitoring and support, vocational training programmes can not only provide women with a basic skill, but also with the ability to independently access economic resources in a sustainable manner.

Do You Know?

The Sat Talai Declaration

We Women Oppose Displacement In One Voice.

We Adivasi, Farmer Labourer, Artisan, Slum Dweller women have gathered at this village of Sat-Talai on the banks of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh today this 27th day of March, 1995. In the last three days we shared our experiences and we felt that:

Across the country big dams, industries, mines, power plants, atomic power plants and such like so called development projects are robbing us of our water, forests, land and other natural resources and are being used to hound us.

Our rights to forest produce are getting eroded due to the forest policy, protected areas, national parks etc. We are losing our rights over basic necessities such as fuel, water and fodder. We women bear the direct burden of this entire mode of inhuman development. On the one hand our traditional rights/knowledge and practices concerning fodder, leaves, forest produce, wood, medicines, seeds, plants and other basic resources—their use and preservation—are being deliberately destroyed. This increases our work load. On the other our role and rights in the development of our families, society and nation are being eroded. In a patriarchal society, as it is we women have had secondary status. But now this so called modern development and the new economic policy is putting even greater pressure on us.

Development is taking place only of certain areas and of a certain class. The natural resources and the labour of the rest of the country are being used for this purpose. This affects us women the most. Our decision making potential is shrinking and there is a check on our freedom.

This regionally unbalanced development is leading to migration. Women suffer the problems of migration as adivasis, dalits, labourers and farmers; in addition as women in a patriarchal society and its practices they also bear physical exploitation and get low wages. A feeling of insecurity is generated as a result of the disintegration of the village, community, home and family.

Women bear the first blows of the unemployment arising out of the large scale practice of capital intensive techniques in agriculture and craft. We are being displaced from employment along with being displaced from the village, land and home. We are being given such employment which is more time consuming, labour intensive, harder and which pays low wages instead. Such jobs which are unorganised and therefore without regulation, which do not use skills and capacities and which offer no possibility of developing our personalities.

Women have been considered the preservers of natural resources and society but these rights are slipping out of our hands as a result of the development policies and migration. The entire society is faced with a real danger of steady destruction of natural resources on the one hand and social disintegration on the other. The use of such technology is also on the rise which destroys the land, fills the air with toxins, ruins our health, affects the foetus in the womb and handicaps human beings and animals physically and mentally.

Chased away from the village, we come to the city. We make our shelters on the footpaths and in jhuggis. Even basic facilities for life such as a house, water, toilets and electricity are not available to us. We are chased away again in the name of industrialisation and beautification of the city. Once we get displaced we find ourselves getting displaced again and again.

In the name of women's development, many government schemes are being formulated and government machinery and budgets are burgeoning. But on the other hand the status of women is falling steadily. In a statement before parliament, the minister for water resources has said that since independence two crore people have been displaced because of development projects. Of those only 50 lakh people have been compensated/rehabilitated. Nothing is known of the remaining one and a half crore, of which half are women. Eighty lakh women are missing and there is supposed to be women's development in the country.

Source :From Lokayana Bulletin: Women towards Beijing: voices from India. July to October, 1995.

The above declaration by women, who have been most affected by the direction and mode of development shows that drastic rethinking has to be done on the issue of development and women's place in activity, as this has a fundamental bearing on the overall status of women.

So far, as we can see from our preceding discussions that government's attempt to serve a place for women in economic activities has been piece meal, top-sided and essentially welfare oriented. And these schemes suffer from the male-biases that we mentioned briefly in our previous sub-sections. A larger overview and a policy has to be evolved if women's control over their livelihood resources is to be really addressed. In the next section let us see what some non-governmental organisations are doing.

13.5 NGOS' INITIATIVES

There are many NGOs but some NGOs have played a useful role in facilitating women's access to economic resources, despite various constraints. Their participation has been at various levels – implementing agencies of programmes at the grassroots level, imparting training to mobilisers and members of local women's organisations (Mahila Mandals). And also providing support to individual women and women's groups, helping women to obtain loans, working with the state and central governments, conducting field research and critiquing policies. In short, they have been catalytic agents of change – albeit in small pockets and often without wider perspective and with very limited aims.

A lot of documentation has been done on large NGOs, such as SEWA etc. There are a number of small NGOs functioning in their local areas. The contribution of these NGOs, though on a much smaller scale, is also significant. Two small illustrations would be sufficient to highlight this statement.

In a small village of Midnapur district in West Bengal, an NGO has made a tremendous effort in the field of development in general and women in particular. Strangely, this district has very high rates of divorce and separation. In addition to providing these women with vocational training, they provide them with a shelter home, a school for their children, as well as a counselling centre.

Another NGO, existing in the heart of the Old City Area of Hyderabad, is an oasis for adolescent girls of poor families who have been victims of "Arab marriages". They provide the girls with

vocational training, help them obtain loans, facilitate marketing, assist them in filing and fighting a case against their "husbands".

Despite various monetary and infrastructural constraints these and many other similar NGOs provide disadvantaged women with committed and sincere support.

13.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

It emerges from the above discussion that women's access to economic resources is primarily dependent upon socio-cultural norms. A combined effort by the government, NGOs, academia, policy makers, concerned individuals, and media working with the wider perspectives provided by women's movements is required to counter and subsequently change this social order. Only such an effort can ultimately help women to be economically self-sufficient.

A support system is essential for women to realise their potential and their ability to stand on their own. To be able to be a decision maker in her own right, a woman should be able to support herself for survival, and to be able to do that she must have control over economic resources, which will give her the enabling power.

In our elective course on women and economy we will discuss various aspects of the importance of economic resource, in detail.

13.7 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Beneficiary** : Any person who receives help in terms of money, loan, grant or some such thing.
- Dissemination** : To spread widely, information for example.
- Monitoring** : To watch or to check a person, a programme, so that a desired result is achieved.
- Top-down approach** : Any approach or view where the people for whom development is being undertaken are not involved, and these people and their views, decisions or the situation and their circumstances are not reflected.
- Unorganized** : Not following any organized system. In the case of an industry it would mean an informal system where the labour force is not organised.

13.8 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Aggarwal, Bina (1994) *A Field of One's Own : Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Committee on the Status of Women in India, (1974) Towards Equality. New Delhi: Government in India

UNIT 14 EDUCATION AND HEALTH

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- 14.8 Some Useful Readings

14.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In this unit on health and education, we will be discussing two very important resources that women have been denied. In a modern world, like ours, education and health are two very important imperatives for even basic survival. We all know, to put it in every day simplistic terms, that a woman who has no education not only has she little awareness of the larger world, but may have a little chance of finding gainful employment. Very often, such women find themselves joining the labour force as household workers, which in any case is not considered economically worthy. The general impression is that women do nothing that is worthwhile, so, it is generally felt that there is no need for either providing them with basic nutrition or health facilities or education. Women are constantly caught in this vicious circle. Education and health both provide the catalytic effect to break this vicious circle. In this unit we will address some of the issues related to women's health and education.

The basic aim of this unit is to :

- Look at the status of women with reference to health and education;
- Critically examine some of the policy documents;
- Analyse the linkage between health and education; and
- Situate these two resources in their socio-cultural setting.

We hope that by reading this unit you would be able to look at health and education not as yet another statistical variable but as two important resources for enabling women. We would also like you to see these important resources in their socio-cultural every day setting.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of block 3, which discusses the problems as well as strategies of enabling women. In our previous units we have discussed the various problems associated with state initiatives and legislative redress available for women — in terms of laws and control over economic resources. In this unit we will be discussing two very important human resources, which are very often denied to women, i.e. education and health.

From the very conception of the female child to her old age, society has been consistently denying her both education and health. We are all familiar with the way a girl is reared and treated. She is rarely sent to school and rarely given the minimum nutrition or health. Needless to say this treatment stems out from the fact that women enjoy very little esteem in the eyes of the society. Culture is the determining factor behind the statistics available on indicators such as fertility, mortality and access to primary education etc. It is a complex network of social structures which reveal the reason for the marginal position of women in India. A quick look at the statistics will reveal that there are regional differences. Kerala and Tamil Nadu for instance, as compared to U.P. and Rajasthan show a low birth rate and high female literacy. Education has implications for the health of the female population. It has been observed that education of the female population has a positive impact in general. The question however is what makes a particular community send their female children to school or give them better facilities.

In this unit we will attempt to analyse the various factors which produce stumbling blocks in the way of healthy and educated women.

14.2 EDUCATION AND POLICY DOCUMENTS

Education and health are engraved in the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India. An educated and healthy population is considered the greatest human resource for any nation. The concern and focus on education and health are evident in the several Five Year Plan documents and the various national policies on health and education that have been drafted at different points of time since India's independence. Among the social indicators that are utilized to assess the Human Development index of countries by the United Nations Development Programme, published in the form of an annual report titled Human Development Report, literacy indicators, specifically female literacy, and health indicators, specifically infant mortality rate, life expectancy and maternal mortality receive significant weightage.

14.2.1 The Universal Right to Education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the first international treaty which recognizes the right to education. The Declaration postulates that education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. One of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution enjoins that, 'The State shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years, from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years' (the Constitution of India, Art 45). This corresponds closely to Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Rights. The Five-Year Plan documents set the achievement of universal availability and equality of opportunity for education as a basic means of promoting the general welfare.

14.2.2 The National Policy on Education

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 states the need for 'an unqualified priority to universalisation of elementary education...universal enrolment... and universal retention of children up to 14 years of age' (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1989). The NPE called for an investment of 6% of national income or GDP in education during the Eighth Five-Year Plan. The NPE was a landmark in the field of women's education and empowerment. The section on 'Education for Women's Equality' considers empowerment of women as a critical precondition for their participation in the education process and other development activities. On the basis of the policy statement a series of women's empowerment programmes, popularly known as 'Mahila Samakhyas', have been initiated in different states of India. The programme is assuming a lot of significance in the lives of rural women. The concomitant impact on the health of women needs to be observed.

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that signatories "recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular make primary education compulsory and free to all" (Article 28), has been ratified by India. Apart from basic education being a human right it also has economic rationality to it. Investment in education is seen as a vital instrument to achieve the country's economic advancement.

14.3 ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF BASIC EDUCATION

Education is the point of convergence in social policies and economic approaches. Prior to the discovery of Human Capital Theory by Shultz in 1961, the concentration was on physical capital namely, machinery, equipment or building. It is observed that education contributes to the acquisition of skills, attitudes and so on, which contributes to individual productivity. There is empirical evidence which shows that education especially basic education helps reduce poverty by increasing the productivity of the poor. By reducing fertility, improving health, and by equipping people with the skills to participate fully in the economy and in the society, education contributes to the efficiency of the social sector investment by enhancing the outcomes (World Bank, 1955). From an investment point of view, the investment in primary education is to be preferred particularly in countries which are yet to universalise basic education.

14.3.1 Women's Education

Formal education of women in India began over a hundred years ago. However, the improvement in general literacy was slow till the time of independence. And though the ratio of female literacy to male literacy in India between the pre-independence period and the post-independence period has increased considerably, the difference between male literacy and female literacy still persists.

The decennial census enumeration carried out by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, defines literacy as the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can read but cannot write is not defined as literate. According to the censuses, the progress of literacy in the total population was as follows: 24.90% in 1951, 34.46% in 1961, and 53.12% in 1991 (Table 1). The situation in respect of female literacy is even more disappointing. The progress has been as follows: 7.83% in 1951, 12.96% in 1961, 18.69% in 1971, 24.82% in 1981 and 32.89% in 1991. It may be noted that literacy among females in 1991 (32.89%) was a little less than literacy among males in 1961 (34.46%), implying a lag of 30 years (Dandekar, 1996).

Table : 1 - Male and Female Literacy, 1961-1991

Year	Percentage of Literacy in Total Population		Percentage of Literacy in Population	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961	34.46	12.96	40.39	15.33
1971	39.45	18.69	45.95	21.97
1981	46.89	24.82	53.49	28.48
1991	53.12	32.89	60.60	37.74

Source: Dandekar, 1996: p.72.

If the rate of growth in literacy since 1961 to 1981 is taken into consideration the rise in rate for males was 92.3% and for females it was 36.3%. However, the absolute percentages indicate the low percentages that were there to begin with. Differentials also prevail in literacy rates in rural and urban areas, with the rural population having lower rates than the urban population. Literacy rates for urban females are higher than those for rural males are (Karkai, 1991). There has been substantial increase in enrolment at all levels including those for girls and for SCs and STs.

Education attainment of women has been uneven corresponding to the class distinction of Indian society. Hence, women from the middle and upper classes acquire education, though largely stereotyped, as opposed to women from the lower classes where poverty coupled with the low valuation of the benefits of education, deter girls from going to school. Thus the success of the Indian literacy programme rests in addressing the illiteracy of rural women and girls, though there is no denying that improving the participation of all sections is imperative.

14.4 GIRL CHILD AND EDUCATION

Women and girls globally constitute the largest single category of persons denied full and equal opportunities for education. The UNESCO's 1995 World Education Report reopens the debate on discrimination against women and girls. The report notes that: "Women today represent two-thirds of the world's literate adults, while girls account for a similar proportion of the world's out-of-school population" (DPEP, 1996).

The education of the girl child received a specific focus during the year 1992, which was declared as the year of the Girl Child'. Considerable evidence had accumulated by this time in terms of low enrollment in schools and high drop out rate after primary level, high work participation rates of girl children and the low age at marriage prevalent in many parts of India. The education of girl children in general and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in particular is an issue of concern. The education of girls is a low priority for families that generally place a relatively better emphasis on the education of the boys. Girls and women do not gain equal access to a range of resources and services within the household. Moreover, the non-availability of schools that are in close proximity, irregular teacher attendance in many schools, uninteresting and alienating school curriculum, teaching methods and materials compound the problems especially in rural areas, even

if parents have the inclination. Studies also indicate a close relationship between the education of girl child to the educational attainment of the father or any other adult member in the household, indicating the inter-generational impact of education.

Low nutritional levels that stunt growth, low age at marriage, pregnancy and child birth, low birth weight of babies, low chances of infant survival and higher chance of deaths due to child bearing among young women, brought into focus the status-related aspects pertaining to girl children and women in India. Longer years of schooling have been observed to have a positive effect on increasing the age at marriage and in turn reduce material and infant mortality. These aspects will be discussed at length in a later section.

Learn From Your Experience 1.

You must have come across girl children, who work as domestic servants, in some of your localities. Find out the reason as to why they are unable to go to school.

14.4.1 Inter-State Inequalities

The all India literacy data masks the large variations that exist across states, rural and urban regions, communities and gender. The lowest female literacy rate in the country was 20% in Rajasthan in 1991 and the lowest male literacy rate was 52% in Bihar. Illiteracy is acute among deprived communities. The male and female literacy rates among SCs were 45% and 19% and the corresponding figures for STs is 41% and 18%. A recent study observed that attendance rates were extremely low in the rural areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) as well as in Haryana, Orissa and Jammu and Kashmir. At the all-India level, a total of around 36 million boys and 42 million girls are estimated to be out of school in 1995. In UP alone, 8.7 million boys and 9.2 million girls are out of school (Ramachandran, Rawal & Swaminathan, 1997).

Think it Over 1

- 1) Why do you think that there are substantial difference in health and educational status of women, between south India and north India?
- 2) In what way does education have a direct impact on the health of the girl and the mother?

14.5 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

The health of a population is dependent on the social, economic, cultural, political and environmental factors prevailing in the country. Health as an outcome is contingent on factors that operate at three levels: the political, the social and the household. Patriarchal values and cultural perspectives intersect at all levels, which have implications for women.

At the political level, the policies and programmes of the state pertaining to a wide range of issues, e.g. agricultural, industry, employment, health, forest and so on have an impact on household income and on access to vital requirements to live in dignity. At the societal level caste, class, religious and ethnic differences determine the location of the household in the social structure. At the household level, the total household income determines the purchasing power of health goods and services.

The physical location of the household in a social environment determines the access to housing space, clean drinking water, air, sanitation, drainage, accessibility and availability of health services, and so on. The health culture at the community and household level with respect to health beliefs and practices are additional factors that determine the health situation of the household. At the intra-household level, studies have observed that an unequal access to goods and services exist on the basis of age, gender and kinship status. Women's health within the household is typically dependent on her age, marital status and position in the household, and of course the status of women in society in general.

Patriarchal values are manifest at each of these levels. At the political level, the values pertaining to the normative roles that women play in society, as wives and mothers, determine the designing and implementation of programmes. Thus, women's fertility is targeted through the Family Planning Programme; and women as mothers are addressed for a range of child health programmes. Paradoxically, while women are the guardians of household health through their domestic roles, there is least empirical evidence to indicate women's decision making power in health matters. The societal and cultural valuation of sons as opposed to daughters, the lower value attached to women's non recognised work inside and outside the house, and so on, have an impact on women's self-esteem and foster women's neglect of their own health.

Learn From Your Experience 2

Think of several social norms which say what a woman should and should not eat. Write these down and discuss them with your friends at the study centre or send them over to the faculty.

14.5.1 Health Status

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined healthy "as a state of physical, mental and complete well being and not the absence of disease or infirmity" (1958). The health status of a population is assessed through demographic indicators such as mortality (death) rates, life expectancy, morbidity (disease incidence and prevalence) rates and so on, which essentially point to the absence of health.

The death rate in India is 10 which is equivalent to the rates attained by any developed country. However, a close examination of the death rates indicate that infant mortality rate (IMR), and deaths of women in the reproductive ages, a large percentage of which is due to material causes (maternal mortality rate - MMR), continue to exist. The IMR, i.e. deaths of children in the 0-5 age group for every 1000 live births, for 1991 in India is 90. The estimates for MMR (i.e. deaths of women during pregnancy, childbirth and 48 days after delivery for every 1,00,000 live births), varies from 390 to 2000. A recent study of maternal mortality, in 55 medical college hospitals, ten district hospitals and 3 community blocks from 1992-94, placed the estimate for all India at 572. The state wise disaggregated data indicates the MMR at 1120 for Bihar, Madhya pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (the Hindi belt). The other states put together have the MMR at 489. Anaemia, an outcome of inadequate nutritional intake and an extraordinary work burden, is one of the major causes of maternal deaths (Bhatt, 1996).

The morbidity risk that women carry, specifically concerning reproductive health, is being given a lot of attention at present. Women are considered to be more vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted diseases and specifically HIV/AIDS through heterosexual modes of transmission, where

they lack the power to negotiate safe sex either as wives, sexual partners or as sex workers. Women's status related issues have a larger role to play in health outcomes than the mere presence of health care services.

14.5.2 Education and Health Linkages

The positive outcomes of attaining education are considered to be many. The particular association between education and several health outcomes has come to light during the last few decades. Research with macro data in examining this linkage pertains to fertility behaviour, i.e. the preference to have small or big families; contraceptive use; and child survival, i.e. infant mortality rates, performance of immunisation, knowledge and use of Oral Dehydration Therapy (ORTs) and so on. The knowledge pertaining to infections, diseases, the requisite individual and household practices, and health seeking behaviour are areas that are examined in micro settings to understand the education and health linkage. The recent National Family Health Survey data demonstrates these linkages, which we will present in the relevant sections.

14.5.3 Education and Fertility Behaviour

Fertility behaviour understood in simple terms as the preference to have big or small families, is observed to be influenced by the level of education, specifically attained by women. The examination of fertility behaviour is done with the help of demographic indicators such as crude birth rates (CBR), general fertility rates (GFR), and total fertility rate (TFR). The states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu have attained low birth rates and total fertility rates (TFR) and this is attributed to the female literacy levels of these states which are very high (See Table 2). Given this information it might be simplistically assumed that the preference for large families is merely due to lack of education or of superstitions. It needs to be understood that apart from fertility behaviour being culturally rooted, it also has a host of economic dimensions. The following may be noted a) children contribute through labour inputs in agriculture and artisan families; (b) among poor families children contribute to the family survival from an early age, they are an asset rather than a liability; (c) in the absence of any old age pensions, etc., children are seen as a security during the period of old age or disability. It is also observed that high infant mortality rate (IMR) creates the conditions of high fertility. Families have more children as a mechanism to ensure the survival of at least a few children.

Women's health and children health are interlinked issues. Hence, improvements in child survival and the contingent declines in infant mortality rate (IMR) induces the declines in total fertility rate (TFR), which in turn improves women's reproductive health. Similarly, improvements in women's health status which has an intergenerational effect contributes significantly to the decline in infant mortality rate.

Think it Over 2

- 1) Can you think of factors which influence the fertility behaviour in a community?
- 2) Why is the health of a child linked to the health of the mother?
- 3) List the daily chores that woman is engaged in her day to day life.

Table: 2 Fertility by Background Characteristics

Background Characteristic	Total Fertility Rate	Mean No. of Children ever born to women: age 40 - 49
Residence		
Urban	2.70	4.16
Rural	3.67	5.13
Caste/Tribe		
Scheduled Caste	3.92	5.40
Scheduled Tribe	3.55	4.81
Others	3.30	4.76
Education		
Illiterate	4.03	5.26
Literate, Middle	3.01	4.50
Middle School Complete	2.49	3.71
High School Complete	2.15	2.80
Total	3.39	4.84

*Rate for Women age 15-49 years

Source: NFHS, India, 1992-93: p.97.

14.5.4. Education and Child Survival

A review of the World Fertility Survey data of 115 countries conducted among child bearing women in several countries had identified the positive correlation of maternal education to decline in child mortality (Caldwell, 1979). The Indian data on the relationship of IMR to mother's education in Table 3, reveals this trend very clearly.

This observation has been reiterated by the recent National Family Health Survey (1992-93). The data presented in Figure. 1 indicates;

- Higher male infant mortality compared to female infant mortality at an aggregate level. However, the detailed data (not presented here), indicates that whereas males have a higher risk of dying in the first month of life, females have this risk between their first to the fiftieth birthdays. This reversal is thought to reflect the relative nutritional and medical neglect of girls after the cessation of breast-feeding.
- Lower rates of infant mortality rate among mothers in the prime reproductive years. Children of both very young and old mothers are at higher risk of dying.
- Child spacing patterns have a powerful effect on the survival chances of children. As the length of birth spacing decreases the risk of infant dying is higher.

Table: 3 Infant Mortality Rate by Mother's Education

Educational Level	Rural	Urban
Literate	90	53
Primary and above	64	49
Literate below primary	105	59
Illiterate	132	81

Source: Survey of Infant and Child Mortality, 1979, Office of the Registrar General, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 1981; quoted in World Bank (19xx), 'Gender and Poverty in India'. Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

The data presented in Figure 2, indicates:

- Infant mortality declines sharply with the increasing education of mother;
- Higher infant mortality in rural areas than in urban areas;
- Scheduled Castes have higher levels of infant mortality than Scheduled Tribes, who in turn have higher levels than non-SC/ST Women.
- Hindus have higher infant and child mortality than all other religious groups.

Pre-natal, ante-natal and post natal care at maternity, deliveries in an institutional set up, seeking trained attendance at birth, the knowledge of vaccinations, immunisations, and so on, are all considered to be aspects positively associated with female education. The mechanism whereby women's education results in lower child mortality has been a subject of conceptual modeling. A recent micro study that had examined the complex linkages between gender inequality, poverty and reproductive behaviour, observed the powerful impact of per capita income as an explanatory variable for fertility as opposed to literacy indicators (ISST, 1996). Another study on Tamil Nadu's recent demographic experience with disaggregated district level data, indicated the falsity of broad based generalisations of the greater autonomy of women in South India. Ostensibly there are higher female literacy rates, greater female work participation rates and female friendly kinship structures which lead to decline in fertility. However vast intra-regional variations exist which baffle these generalisations according to the author. Therefore, while high fertility rates resulting from lack of autonomy is understandable and plausible, low fertility rates need not necessarily imply the presence of autonomy for women (Swaminathan, 1996).

Do You Know? 1

Statistical Myths: Misrepresenting Women's Health

Quantifiable data in the modern day has increasingly become the basis of assessing the state of things. With global processes being measured through a baffling array of numbers, trying to understand the games statistics can be crucial to awareness about them. This is particularly true of women's health figures. Globally, commitments have been made to enhance women's health status, sought to be measured through maternal mortality, infant mortality, fertility rate, sex ratio, etc.

Women health activists and researchers have called for a revision of the rather limited view of women's health afforded through numbers relating to women's reproductive years, or by just quoting their increased life expectancy without referring to the age group of women who are dying, or the socio-economic category they belong to.

Such concerns led some health activists to persuade the coordination Unit, New Delhi to take up work of demystifying health statistics for women and reveal the (un?) truth behind them. Coordination Unit, in collaboration with the Christian Medical Association of India, New Delhi is preparing a set of posters that graphically seek to simplify complex statistics and make the hidden message visible. The posters will also identify gaps in collection of gender, caste and class disaggregated data that can barely be representative of women's health in developing countries such as India.

The Health Advisory Team members have suggested that it is worth pursuing the exercise of sharing knowledge about statistical collection of data and mobilising to work towards correcting the gaps that lead women's health to be reduced to non-realistic aggregates which hide her pitiable health status.

From Lokayana Bulletin – Women Towards Beijing: Voices from India, July-Oct. 1995.

14.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present paper had covered various aspects pertaining to education and health, specifically with reference to women and the girl child.

We must add here that the discussion we presented is very general and touches only the salient points on health and education. The health education status of any population is normally presented through indicators such as mortality, morbidity, fertility etc. Similarly the educational status of any population is evident through the statistics available. These statistics however, do not necessarily indicate the actual complex process which create such trends.

14.7 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Contraception** : To prevent conception from happening through various devices, so a baby is not conceived.
- Demography** : The statistical study of population.
- House-hold** : All those who are living in a single house.
- Literacy** : The ability to read and write.
- Mortality** : The proportion of death in a population-mortality rate.

14.8 SOME USEFUL READINGS

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**Foundation Course in
Women's Empowerment
and Development**

Block

4

CASE STUDIES : PARTICIPATORY ACTIONS

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION :

CASE STUDIES : PARTICIPATORY ACTIONS

This block concerns itself with the issues of women and environment. These issues relate both to the national environment as also the social environment.

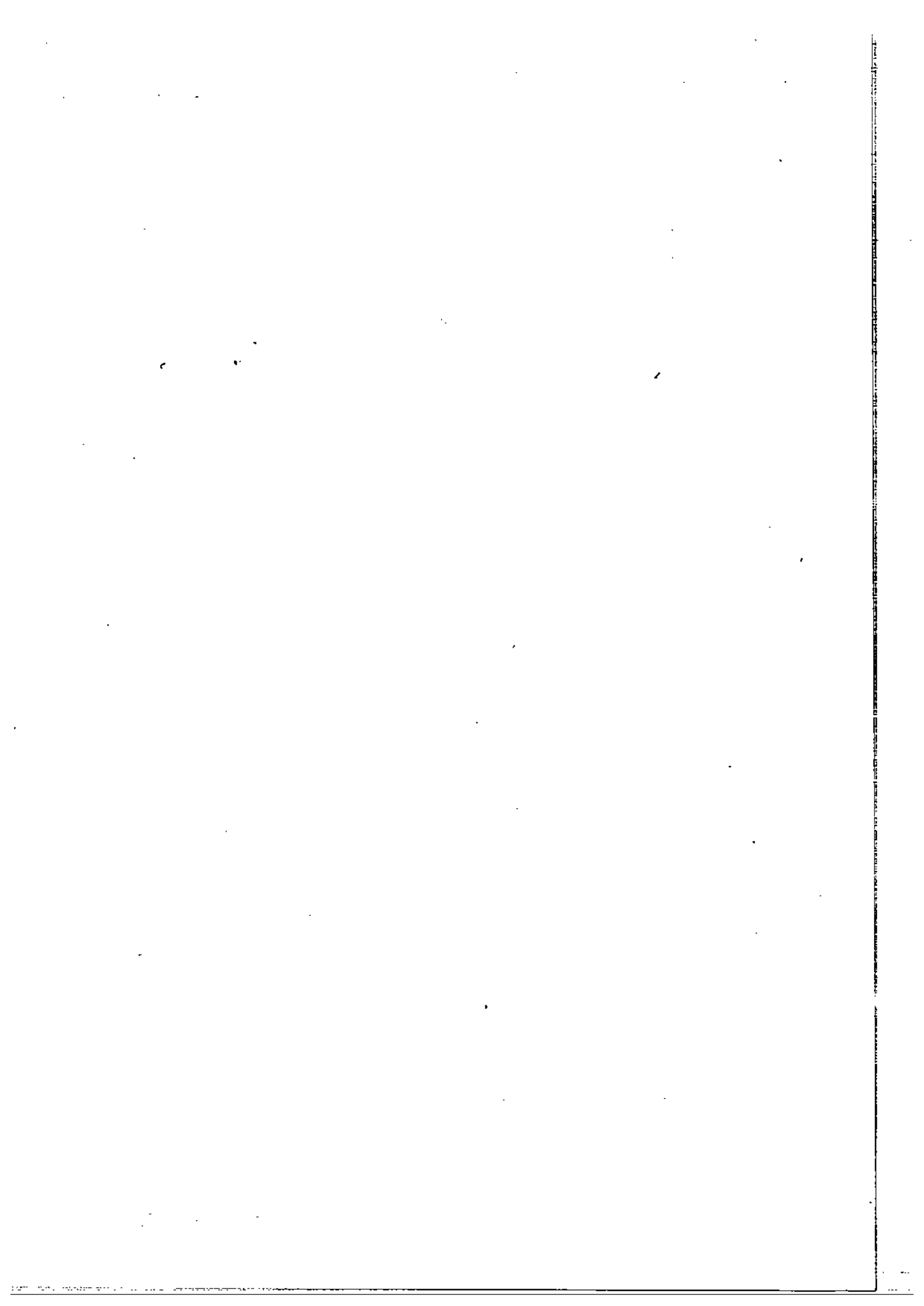
Thus in Unit 15 is discussed the concept of ecology in India and the effects of environmental degradation on women. We also discuss the issues of gender, and biodiversity in relation to the environment. Specific case studies are taken up concerning the Chipko, Appiko, Narmada and Gandhamardan Movements.

In Unit 16 we take up the question of women and cooperatives and ask what a cooperative really is. We take up in detail some case studies including that of SEWA and ask how cooperatives can lead to empowerment. The other areas explored in this unit are those of women and environment for work and the issues related to gender bias.

Unit 17 relates to a single case study on the anti arrack struggle by women. We begin by stating how prohibition has always been a theory issue both in colonial and post-independence India. In 1992 the anti arrack struggle began in earnest led by women who picketed liquor shops, and forced their menfolk to abandon liquor. In doing so they indicated "woman power" and what it can do when harnessed properly.

Finally in Unit 18 we provide a framework to write a research report. This is useful for the student since he/she comes to know about target group, contents and various other considerations, such as the ethical.

Thus this group of units is very useful in considering the various issues, theoretical and practical, of women and their role in empowering themselves, and hence living a better existence.



UNIT 15 WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

Contents

- 15.0 Aims and Purpose
- 15.1 Introduction
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- 15.3 Environmental Degradation and Effects on Women
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- 15.7 Limitations and Problems in Women's Participation
- 15.8 Concluding Remarks
- 15.9 Clarification of the Terms Used
- 15.10 Some Useful Readings

15.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

In this Unit, we have discussed the special and different relationship that women have with ecology in comparison to men. After going through this unit you should be able to:

- explain the differences in attitude, approach, and interests between men and women, even within the same community, in relation to their environment;
- how ecological degradation affects women much more than men in different ecological regions;
- how women have responded and participated in various environmental movements in post-independence India. You will become familiar with some important case studies.

The purpose of this unit is twofold: one is to introduce and expand upon the theme of the importance of maintaining a balance with nature, meaning forests and dwellings, and the consequences of construction which does not keep the entire environmental equation in mind. The second aspect is to make you realise that in many environmental issues it is the women who are directly affected and it is they who have been in the forefront of several important environmentally conscious movements in India.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Ecology for tribals, nomads, fisher folk and artisans is not a source of profit but a source of their survival. Degradation of this eco-system deprives them of the life support system around which they have built their economic and socio-cultural life. Ecological degradation is a result of the exploitative nature of the current economic process, which as a result has led to the establishment of various unsustainable social forestry projects, and the marginalization of women in control of natural resources.

In this unit we plan to delineate the concept of social ecology in India, especially with reference to environmental degradation and its effects on women. We do this by studying gender in relation to the environment and biodiversity.

We then go on to study women and environmental movements in rural India, including the Chipko, Appiko, Narmada and Gandhamardan movements. Finally we make some observations on the limitations and problems of the participation of women in such movements.

15.2 CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY IN INDIA

Felling of trees for commercial purposes, mining in the forests, construction of large dams in forest areas severely affect the livelihood of the tribals and the rural poor who live in the forest and depend upon it for fuel, food, firewood, fodder and fibre. Big development projects also create the problem of mass displacements that socially, economically and culturally uproot the rural poor from the natural homeland.

Unlike western countries where development projects are built in uninhabited areas, each ecological niche in India is occupied by some group or community; thus these large projects threaten the very livelihood of the people living on it. Moreover, western environmentalists have been primarily concerned with conservation of pristine nature, flora and fauna for their aesthetic value. They emphasize on deep ecology that views the natural world in its own terms. Deep ecology is more a product of traditional environmental concerns, seeking to expand upon the values of the wilderness in the preservation movement. In comparison, social ecology occupies an important place in Indian environmentalism as the social life of various sections of people, especially the rural poor, is intertwined with their eco-systems. Social ecology emphasizes the embeddedness of human consciousness in nature, a radical critique of hierarchy and domination in society, and the historical unity of ecological and social concerns.

15.3 ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND EFFECTS ON WOMEN

Numerous studies have shown that women, specially in rural areas, are the worst affected group in ecologically devastated areas as they carry the major burden of their respective families. Among them, women from marginal, landless families face the worst situation. Though there is no existing data on the increase in their work load, the existing records on the amount of time they spend on work is shocking.

The impact of deforestation affects adivasi women much more than men since the tribal and forest economy is essentially a women's economy. Deforestation compels adivasi women to walk longer distances in search of minor forest produce and firewood vital to tribal economy. A study shows that the Kond tribal women put in an average of 14 working hours per day as compared to 9 hours by men. As forest produce becomes rarer the tribal women have to seek alternative sources of income to supplement the family diet, forcing them to migrate in search of livelihood. Another major consequence of deforestation has been the disappearance of medicinal herbs, which leads to deterioration of the physical health of the tribals and women in particular.

Do You Know? 1

Women spend about 14 to 16 hours foraging for fuel, fodder, and water, i.e. in fulfilling basic household needs. There is not one day which is a holiday for them. Women living in arid and semi-arid parts of the country, as well as in villages situated in hilly and mountainous terrains face the worst situation. Deforestation in these areas has led to an acute shortage of fuel, fodder and water. As a result women and children sometimes go early in the morning and have to walk more miles to get fuel, wood, fodder and drinking water, and return back late. In an average semi-arid village, a woman walks as much as 1400 kms a year the distance from Delhi to Calcutta to collect firewood alone. The situation with respect to firewood is much worse in hilly and mountainous areas, where barren slopes are leading to "cold hearths."

On the contrary, in a state like Kerala, where ecoclimatic conditions permit a rich green cover, the work burden of women is much smaller, probably the least in the country. Even the minimal land reforms, in which landless families have been distributed one tenth of an acre as homestead plots, has meant access to a few dozen coconut trees, which helps to provide at least half the annual fuel requirements.

Collection of water is almost always a women's responsibility. Taking over of the water source by dams, or water pollution by "development" projects, affects women's lives most. For example, in Kohadia village of Korba in Madhya Pradesh, since the river was full of fly-ash, the women had to depend on private wells of the better-off members of the colony. With no grazing lands, cattle had to get rid of. Kohadiya is not an exceptional case, such cases are becoming common in many parts of the country.

Male migration has further increased the work load of women in the recent years. Women not only take care of their household needs but they also have to take care of their agricultural holdings. As such women lead strenuous lives and now they are literally reaching the end of their "carrying capacities."

Think it Over 1

- 1) Does ecological degradation affect women more in comparison to men? Are the eco-systems in your region unfair to the condition of women?
- 2) What are the five basic needs which rural women depend on in their daily lives? What can be done to improve their condition?

15.4 GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT

The concept of ecofeminism has gathered some currency in modern environmental movements that view nature from women's perspective. Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s with an increasing consciousness of the connections between women and nature. The term "ecofeminism" was coined in 1974 by French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne, who called upon women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet. Such an ecological revolution would entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature.

Though the concept is of western origin, it has gained popularity in Indian environmental movements

also. An important question is: Do women differ from men in their attitude, behaviour, and practices in relation to their ecosystems where they live? Does a hill woman or a peasant woman feel, respond, and act differently to her natural environment that sustains her livelihood in comparison to a man in the same family? There are mainly two views regarding this. One view comes from the radical feminist school of thought who believe that women are closer to nature than men. They are natural conservationists, and nurture the nature better than men.

Tribals, especially their women, are custodians of a culture rooted in integrated eco-values. The wisdom of the tribals is that the earth meets the basic needs of not only humans, but of the entire creation; so they do not take or extract from nature anything more than what is essential; their art, leisure and entertainment are in partnership with mother Earth. They also perceive the divine and the sacred in the trees, hill streams, animals and in all creation. The Earth is mother Goddess for them. It is amazing the way the tribals have discovered, selected and preserved, over generations, the rich bio-diversity in nature.

The other is a modern view which interprets gender differences in attitudes to nature in terms of the division of labour. According to this view, women essentially manage the household affairs; therefore they are directly affected by the degradation of forests. While "man-the hunter" has been projected as the main bread winner, it is actually "woman-the gatherer" who has been the source of sustained food supply. She gathered fruits, nuts, edible leaves, flowers, mushrooms, roots, tubers, etc. while meat was only supplementary food item. Thus resource uses of trees are taken into account to understand women's perception. It is because of their pivotal role in day-to-day house management, that women's perception and approach toward nature significantly varies from men.

Think It Over 2:

- 1) What is eco-feminism? Try to summarise its basic postulates with the help of some notes.
- 2) Explain the two views regarding women's perception and attitudes towards nature. Is there a contradiction of interests in them or not?

15.5 WOMEN AND BIO-DIVERSITY

Women who rely on forests and agriculture prefer diversity, which is also extended to their relationship with nature. While men prefer mono-culture as it gets them ready cash, women prefer varieties of trees that would meet several household requirements.

Several studies have also shown that while men prefer a cash crop economy, women have selected biomass based trees in afforestation programmes. Such preferences were clearly seen during the Chipko Andolan which will be discussed later. Even in the same household, we can find cases of men happy to destroy nature to earn cash even though it could create greater hardships for the women in collecting daily fuel and fodder needs. The new culture created by penetration of the cash economy has slowly but steadily alienated men from their eco-system. Employment for them means work which can bring cash in their hands. Men show less resentment toward mono-culture than women. The burden of cooking, household management, gathering of fuelwood, etc. has made women think differently within the same community. Women like plants and trees that give both food and non-food products.

Learn From Your Experience 1

Talk to some poor rural folks living or working in your vicinity. Ask them about their daily life with reference to their interaction and dependence on the environment. Try to evaluate how this has changed in recent times, and note down your findings.

15.6 WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN RURAL INDIA

Though male subjugation has burdened women with work, this has not hampered their growing participation and support to movements in order to save the forests and the ecology.

Women have actively participated in several environmental movements in the post-independent era to save their environment and livelihood: Chipko in Garhwal Himalayas in the early 1970s, the Appiko movement in Karnataka in the 1980s, the Gandhamardan and Baliapal movements in Orissa in mid-1980s, the Narmada movement in Madhya Pradesh, the Chilika movement in Orissa in the 1990s. These are some of the movements in which women have come forward as protectors of the natural habitat. While the number of small and big movements has been on the rise, we will illustrate here four environmental movements from different geographical regions of India, and assess the role and participation of women in these movements. These include movements against various projects such as commercial forestry, construction of big dams, mining, military testing ranges etc., which have adversely affected the poor people, especially women.



The chipko movement- fighting for environment friendly habitat !

Courtesy : India Today

15.6.1 CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Chipko is one of the earliest and most successful movements against commercial logging and deforestation in the post-independence India. Hill women in Garhwal Himalayan region took an active lead in the movement. Decades of intensified penetration of the area by outsiders had led to deforestation and the resulting erosion and floods, while peasants found it harder and harder to find fodder for their animals and firewood for cooking. At last, when the forest department auctioned off large ash trees for clear felling to private contractors, after forbidding the peasants to take the wood for making ploughs, the people decided to take direct action. They marched to the forests and embraced the trees before the startled loggers. Soon it took the form of the Chipko movement.

Chipko which means "hugging the tree" has its roots in ancient Indian cultures that worshipped tree goddesses. The earliest women-led tree embracing movements were three hundred years old in 1763 in Rajasthan. Here the women of the Bishnoi sect laid down their lives by hugging trees to protect them from being felled under orders from the Maharaja of Jodhpur. In the 1970s this was revived by Sunderlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian disciple, who with the help of Chandi Prasad Bhatt mobilized and organized the men and women of Garhwal in the Himalayas to save their forests from commercial exploitation by contractors of Uttarkashi and Gopeshwar. Folk poets like Ghanashyam Raturi helped in creating awareness by singing songs in support of the forest. One of his famous poems describing the method of hugging the trees was:

**Embrace the trees and
Save them from being felled;
The property of our hills,
Save them from being looted.**

This movement succeeded primarily because felling of the forest clashed against the traditional use of forest for food, fuel-wood and fodder. Chipko spread to various regions of the Garhwal Himalayas such as Adwani, Amarsar and Badiyargarh and later inspired similar movements in other parts of the country too. As a result of this movement, the government put a fifteen years ban on commercial green felling in the hills of Uttar Pradesh.

Chipko has not only set an example for the contemporary environmental movements nationally and internationally, it has set an example of women's leading role in environmental movements. It was the so-called illiterate women who were the first to grasp, with intuitive ease, the elemental truth that natural resources are as precious as life. It proved that women can be natural preservers and conservers of forests. This while men view government officials with fear, respect and even awe the women due to lack of direct contact with them follow the dictates of their conscience. They simply 'know' that tree felling is wrong and harmful for the community as a whole.

Do You Know? 2

The Chipko protesters organised rallies, marches, blockades, hugging trees, picketing and singing. The high point of this movement was in March 1974, when twenty seven women under the leadership of Goura Devi saved a large number of trees from contractor's axe in Reni. Except for a few organised movements, women acting on their own rose up at the spur of the moment. While in Reni, this protest was against a timber contractor, in most cases the protest was against their own cash-hungry men who could not care less if the forest was destroyed while their women had to walk for many extra miles to collect their daily load of fuel and fodder.

Chipko also proved that women not men are forerunners in the afforestation programmes. The sharp difference of interests of men and women over trees is evident from the experience of the Chipko Andolan. During new plantation programmes, while the men in this region showed an interest in fruit trees, women chose trees that would give fuel and fodder. "What will we get if fruit trees are planted? The men will sell fruits and purchase liquor or tobacco" said a woman. It is the women who are doing most of the afforestation work organised by the Chipko movement.

Chipko had wider implications. It helped to stop clear felling in the Western Ghats and Vindhyas, and helped to generate a national forest policy which is more sensitive to the people's needs and to the ecological development of the country.

15.6.2 Appiko Movement

A decade after Chipko movement began, a similar movement, called the Appiko movement (Appiko means to "hug" in Kannada), took place in Western Ghats of southern state of Karnataka. In this district, Uttara Kannada, the forest department had for several decades been promoting teak plantations after clear-felling the existing semi-evergreen forests. In a fashion similar to the Chipko movement, villagers hugged the trees and protested against the commercial felling. They also extracted an oath from the loggers (on the local forest deity) to the effect that they would not destroy trees in the forest. However, the women's role still in this movement needs to be studied.

Learn From Your Experience 2

Try to form a group of men and women who are concerned with the state of the environment in your area. Plant some trees and plants and nurture them to maturity, sharing the responsibility.

15.6.3 Narmada Movement

The Sardar Sarovar Dam project on the Narmada river is another popular struggle, in the post independence period, against the construction of big dams that have displaced thousands of poor people from their homeland. The Sardar Sarovar dam project is part of the Narmada valley development project that plans to build 30 large and 3000 medium and small dams on a single river. The Sardar Sarovar Project will cover 125 miles of a thin strip of territory and also submerge 254 villages and displace 66,000 people.

Though there have been sporadic protests since 1979 a sustained protest movement has been going on since 1986. This has grown into a popular movement uniting people and cutting across class and gender. Women have taken an active lead in Narmada movement. One of the remarkable features of this movement is that it was led by a woman activist, Medha Patkar. That in itself was significant in organizing the tribal women, and binding them along with other women activists into one cohesive unit.

Women who were rarely seen in most of the rallies held before Medha Patkar joined the agitation and were now at the forefront. On 3rd August 1991 when all the men went to jail and Ms Patkar was underground, the women took out rallies thrice a day. In these rallies if a policeman picked up his lathi women would turn their backs and say *maro maro* (hit, hit). In such cases we find that the lack of exposure to women draws from them an honest and integrated response. The concept of womanhood became very much a part of this movement with the song, "*Jameen hamari ma hai / jungle hamara baap hai.*" (The land is our mother, and forest our father) This tremendous force (Stree shakti) was constructively put to use. In spite of the widespread resistance, construction of the Sardar Sarovar project still continues, the people displaced and affected by the dam project

are seeking new ways and means to achieve justice. This movement brought widespread recognition to Medha Patkar which ultimately led her to win the International Right to Livelihood, otherwise known as the alternative Nobel Prize, in 1991.



Bankura Project : A step towards aforestration.

15.6.4 Gandhamardan Movement

In 1985, there was a strong movement against bauxite mining activities of BALCO (Bharat Aluminium Corporation Ltd.) in western Orissa. The bauxite project of BALCO in Gandhamardan hills threatened the life support systems of the tribals and peasants living in the foothills who are dependent for fuelwood, fruits, food, for their daily survival. Women weave baskets from bamboos, and collect kendu leaves for the forest department. Moreover, Gandhamardan hills were the main source of water for them. Mining activity threatened all these, therefore a strong grassroots movement took shape among the people.

Women's participation was significant in this movement where the women took active part in blockading the roads, joining the rallies. Though women joined a bit later than the men because of the cultural blocks in a male dominated set up, once they came forward, the movement took a dramatic turn. These women embraced the earth singing "*Mati Devata amar Dharma devata*" (mother earth is our god), they effectively blockaded the vehicles of BALCO. A large number of women voluntarily courted arrest despite their household duties and spent several days in jail. Women activists and students from various parts of Orissa and other parts of the country joined in mobilizing local women and girls. The militancy shown by the women in the region gave greater strength to the movement. The suffering of these women and children did not go in vain. The BALCO stopped its mining activities in 1989 after the prolonged agitation.

Think it Over 3

- 1) Describe the special role played by women in Chipko Movement.
- 2) How and why did women face the government and forest officials more bravely than their men? Explain with examples from Chipko and Narmada.

15.7 LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

There are many problems in women's response and participation in environmental movements. There are cultural hindrances which either make women feel shy to join and come out in these resistance movements, or to join late. In a male dominated society, women's participation often requires male approval. Besides, women have to make time within their daily household work, cooking, taking care of the children, cleaning of the house, etc. Poor women work both within and outside their homes. Very often their role is not adequately recognized or distinguished in a movement, or in an afforestation programme, due to the deep rooted gender bias in favour of men. Men still enjoy their rights to land, and are considered to be the decision makers of the family. Such biases in thinking also undermine and undervalue the role of women.

Indian rural women are working to maintain their own life support systems through forest and water conservation, to rebuild soil fertility, and to preserve ecological diversity. In many places, women have assumed leadership roles in their own communities. Although they have not received adequate recognition from the governments, and other conservation organizations for their contributions, they nevertheless continue to work slowly. New efforts are being made to involve the local communities in forest regeneration; it is seen from various environmental schemes that women can make a big difference if they are consulted in the decision making processes.

There has been a positive development in empowering women in development processes. The rise in women's movements in the 1980s and 1990s have led many middle class women activists to support the environmental struggles which has in turn, inspired local women to participate or has supported the efforts of the local women. A feminist perspective has emerged in environmental studies as in other areas; and women scholars have begun to highlight the role of women in Indian environmental movements. However, there have not been enough case studies that deal with women's participation, attitude, problems in contemporary environmental movements in sufficient length or depth. More connections are still being discovered between women and nature. Many case studies are required to fill this gap.

15.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen in this unit that issues relating to environment are of crucial importance to India. We have also seen that the responses of rural women are most significant and a number of important movements concerning environment (forests, dwellings, dams etc.) have been led by women themselves. What is more women have been the major participants in them too. Thus it is clear that women are capable of leading in the areas of crucial importance and have contributed greatly to the course of preserving the environment in India.

In this Unit, we began with discussing the relevance of ecology for the common people, and moved to its special relevance to rural and tribal women in their day to day lives. We also pointed out the differences between men and women in their attitude, behaviour, interest, and role toward their environment with various examples. The role of gender has been emphasised. Then we described in detail the role of women in three of India's well known environmental movements; the Chipko movement, the Narmada movement, and the Gandhamardan movement. Finally, we have shown some of the limitations in women's participation, and called for more case studies to understand women's perspective better.

15.9 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Social Ecology** : Social ecology is different from deep ecology; it combines social relations, hierarchy, etc. with ecology.
- Ecofeminism** : This term combines ecology with feminism to emphasize that women have a different and special relation with nature than men.

15.10 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Guha, Ramachandra (ed.) (1994) *Social Ecology*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shiva, Vandana (1988) *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zen Books.

UNIT 16 WOMEN AND COOPERATIVES

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16.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

This unit covers women and the cooperative movement. It also provides an insight into the economic and social conditions of women of the poorer sections. In so doing we provide an insight into:

- Women and the cooperative movement;
- Provide an example of a cooperative movement in SEWA;
- The objective of cooperatives;
- Problems faced by cooperatives;
- Impact of cooperatives on women: economic and social; and
- Problems of the poor women in India.

The purpose of the unit is to point out that cooperatives can be an important means for empowerment of poorer and socially marginalized women. We also indicate that poor women who are in dire economic conditions can attempt a cooperative movement only if their level of information and knowledge increases adequately.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of cooperatives and cooperative movements is important because it is one of the key economic modalities for women who do not have sufficient resources at their command. Under the auspices of a collective endeavor they can get loans and support for other women and attempt to get the best result from their own economic endeavors.

In this unit we begin by asking the question as to what cooperatives are and what they actually comprise of.

We then go on to try to understand what the basic principles of cooperation are. This leads us to a delineation of the social objectives of cooperation. We then take up a study of the SEWA, which is a women's cooperative, and some of the case studies therein including the 'Patch work' cooperative Saundariya, and the Trupti Nasta cooperative. We then discuss the issue of cooperatives and empowerment.

We then discuss the findings of the National Commission on Self Employed Women. This points out that poor women need to be given economic opportunities. However they lack opportunities, skills, education, mobility and have a lack of access to better technology. It is also pointed out that the lot of poor women is a deprived and exploited one and that anti poverty programmes have not reached or 'trickled' down to them.

16.2 WHAT ARE COOPERATIVES?

Cooperatives are institutions which are expected to promote self-management among different sections of the people. The first cooperative society was started in 1844 in a place called Toad-Hall in England. This was a consumer store where essential items such as food and clothes were sold at fair prices. The small group of people who started this cooperative were cloth weavers. They named their cooperative Rochdale and they were referred to as the Rochdale Pioneers since they had in fact pioneered the cooperative movement. This store was started mainly to provide the poor people in the town essential commodities at fair prices. The store was jointly owned by a group of members who had contributed money to start the venture. They received shares for this. The management of the store was elected by the members, and decisions were taken collectively and through voting. The basic principles governing the functioning of this cooperative were:

- i) One vote for each member and not for each share. Hence each member, irrespective of how many shares he or she owned, had only one vote.
- ii) Sale at market prices and not at higher prices.
- iii) Division of profits among share-holders on the basis of the number of shares each held.
- iv) A limit on the dividends paid to the share holders. The cooperative believed that even if profits were high the dividends should not be high. This was because firstly, share holders in a cooperative were expected to buy shares to contribute to the finances of the cooperative and not for mere investment as is done in other companies. Secondly, the excess profits which were not given as dividends could be invested back into the cooperative so that it could expand its activities.

16.2.1 Principles of Cooperation

The above four principles were later adopted by the cooperative movement all over the world. In 1966 the International Cooperative Alliance laid down six basic principles of cooperation which were in fact an extension of the four principles of the Rochdale Pioneers. These are:

- i) Membership to a cooperative must be voluntary and not through force or compulsion.
- ii) The administration of a cooperative must be democratic. The people who are in authority are to be elected and not selected or nominated by someone. The decisions taken by a cooperative have to be based on a consensus of all members or through voting.
- iii) One vote for each member.
- iv) Limited interest on share capital. This is similar to the principle of limited dividends on share capital proposed by the Rochdale Pioneers.
- v) Equitable distribution of surplus. This means that surplus or profits to be distributed according to the number of shares possessed by each and not equally to all at the same rate.
- vi) Promotion of cooperative education among the members. This will enable the members to realise the principles of cooperation and their rights and duties.

Think it Over 1

Why do you think cooperatives and principles of cooperation are successful? Note down your thoughts on a piece of paper, and then read about the 'Principles of Cooperation' again. Have you been able to add something new, which is not covered in the unit?

Another principle, namely, mutual cooperation among cooperatives, was also promoted as it was felt that unless cooperatives helped each other they would find it difficult to exist in a competitive environment. From the above discussion we can see that cooperatives are different from other types of business organisations. The two main differences are that firstly, they do not exist only for profit but they also have social obligations as well. Secondly, unlike privately owned or even government owned enterprises, they stress on the democratic principle in their management.

16.2.2 Social Objectives of Cooperatives

At the same time a cooperative does not exist only to serve the interests of its members. The Commission on Cooperative Principles which was constituted by the International Cooperative Alliance to frame the principles of cooperation (discussed above) noted in its report that "cooperation at its best aims at something beyond promotion of interests of the individual members... Its object is rather to promote the progress and welfare of humanity. It is this aim that makes a cooperative society something different from an ordinary economic enterprise and justifies its being tested not simply from its profits but also from the standpoint of its moral and social values which elevate human life above the merely material and animal". It is very clear from this statement that cooperatives have a social role as well as an economic role. This is what makes them different from the other economic organisations. The social role of a cooperative operates at two levels. Firstly, as the above statement shows, cooperatives have a strong commitment to society. Secondly, a cooperative tries to instill a sense of participation among its members and thus makes them feel that they too are capable of managing their own affairs. This second aspect is closely related with the democratisation of cooperatives. We shall explain this below.

A cooperative can be distinguished from private enterprise by its principle of one vote for each member. We have explained the meaning of this earlier. The attempt here is to ensure that control of the organisation does not lie in the hands of a few members who have managed to corner a large number of shares. Thus in principle the status of all members is the same as they all have equal opportunities for participating in the decision-making process. The Commission on Cooperative Principles observed that democracy in a cooperative is very important for the development of the ordinary members. This is an important social commitment of the cooperative movement. The Commission noted that a cooperative "exists in order to place the common people in effective control of the mechanisms of modern economic life... it must give the individual (only too often reduced to the role of a cog in that machine) a chance to express himself-herself, a voice in the affairs of his/her cooperative and scope to exercise his/her own judgement." It is thus clear that cooperatives, if they are able to operate, will and can help increase the self-confidence of their members by making them realise that they are not naturally helpless and dependent on others but they too are capable of dealing with complex problems of production and management. In the next sections we shall discuss some cases of cooperatives run by economically and socially marginalised women in order to examine how far cooperatives can help in their empowerment.

16.3 WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES: SEWA

The cooperatives which we will study in this section are those which have been started by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. SEWA is a trade union of women workers. Its membership consists of women belonging to the poorest sections of society. In urban areas these women carry out activities such as collection of waste paper from the streets.



Livelihood through self employment

Courtesy : Debal SinghRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

carrying out petty trade such as vending on the pavements, stitching garments, sweeping, rolling *bidis* etc. In rural areas they work as agricultural workers or as marginal farmers. Hence the women who are the members of SEWA all belong to the unorganised or informal sector. It is in fact only major trade union in the country which is working exclusively among women in the informal sector. At present SEWA has a membership of over 200,000 and as such it is the largest trade union in Gujarat.

During the course of their trade union activities, the leadership of SEWA realised that unionisation alone could not solve the problems of the women members. The most positive aspect of trade unions is that they unite workers to fight for their rights. In this process they make the workers realise that their strength lies in their unity. At the same time mere unity and militancy cannot achieve much for these workers as they are very poor and they cannot sustain long drawn struggles. Hence it is necessary to explore other means of collective action alongside trade unions. The leadership of SEWA found that co-operatives could be one such means which could not only help the trade union movement but it could also make the women self-sufficient. Hence SEWA started promoting co-operatives among its members. These co-operatives cover a wide range of services which include industrial co-operatives of bidi rollers, bamboo workers, patch workers and block printers; service co-operatives of vegetable vendors, kerosene vendors, waste paper pickers, cleaners, health and child care workers; co-operatives of salt producers and tree growers in the rural areas and milk co-operatives. Besides, a women's cooperative bank, known as SEWA Bank was started in 1974 for providing credit to the urban and rural poor women and also for collecting their savings. By the end of 1996 SEWA had sponsored 71 co-operatives.

16.3.1 Some Case Studies

In this section we will discuss some of the co-operatives started by SEWA in Ahmedabad city. These include a co-operative of women engaged in making bed-covers, quilts etc. from pieces of waste cloth and two co-operatives started by women engaged in rag picking. All these women belong to the poorest sections of the urban poor. Their existence depends on the collection of waste, either cloth or paper, discarded by people. SEWA started organising these workers into trade unions mainly to protect their right to existence. These women, being poor and helpless, were under constant harassment by the police, civic authorities and middlemen (traders). The objective of SEWA was to organise them so that they could collectively solve their common problems or find other means of existence.

16.3.2 Patch-work Cooperative

A large number of poor women, belonging mainly to the Muslim community, supplemented their meager family earnings by stitching pieces from discarded clothes into bed-covers, quilts or other similar articles. These women were mainly home-based workers. They rarely interacted with outsiders so the only way they could sell their products was through middle-men who gave them an advance and later sold their products to traders. Needless to say, these women were exploited by these middlemen as they paid them very small amounts for their labour. However they had little option but to sell to the middlemen as they were unable to either procure the raw materials or sell the finished goods on their own.

SEWA's activities started with these women. The organisers tried to get them together so that they could collectively solve their problems. The problems they faced were, firstly, availability of waste cloth, secondly, selling the articles at remunerative prices and thirdly, understanding the changes in demand patterns. There was also a more general problem of obtaining credit as no institution

was willing to give them loans. They were thus dependent on the middlemen or money lenders who kept them permanently in debt.

SEWA realised that merely organising the women as a collective would be of little use. The union could help them fight some of the unfair practices of the middlemen or help them get waste cloth at better rates, but these steps would only ease their problems to some extent and would not offer solutions. Hence the best alternative under the circumstances was forming a cooperative which would act as an alternative to their present work arrangement. Thus a handful of women were motivated to form a cooperative known as Sabina Mahila Sewa Chindi Utpadak Cooperative (Sabina women's patchwork producers cooperative). Till 1996 the membership of this cooperative rose to 270 women who were engaged in stitching together waste cloth collected from the textile mills.

Do You Know? 1

After forming the cooperative the union negotiated with the textile mill owners for bulk supplies of waste cloth. This reduced the costs of raw materials, besides, a centralised supply of cloth through the union and the cooperative made the women come together and work in a group rather than remain scattered in their homes. Some of the problems relating to marketing were also overcome as the cooperative helped in marketing the products directly or through ready-made garment hawkers who were also members of SEWA.

The cooperative has helped them understand the problems of the market so that they are able to diversify when the need arises. Patch-work articles do not always have a steady market. Hence a section of the members have started stitching ready-made garments as an alternative source of income. The other major problem which the members were able to reduce is the problem of credit. The cooperative was able to get loans from SEWA Bank. The women were also encouraged to start savings groups so that they could raise their own capital or get loans from the Bank. A saving group (Bachat Mandal) promoted by SEWA consists of 10 to 20 members. The group elects a leader (Agaman) who is responsible for collecting savings from each of the members and depositing these in the Bank. The monthly saving varies according to the economic condition of the members but it is never less than Rs. 10 per month. The savings are deposited in SEWA Bank against each member but the group also is responsible. Members can take loans from the Bank based on the total amount saved by the group. The group acts as security and is also responsible for collecting the dues from those who have taken loans. In this way a major problem of getting loans at reasonable rates of interest is overcome. These women could never have got loans from any financial institution on their own. Moreover since the total savings of the group are taken into account for providing a loan to a member, the individual members are able to benefit as they can take larger amounts of loan than if they were considered as individuals.

16.3.3 Ragpickers' Cooperatives

Another interesting experiment SEWA is carrying out relates to rag/waste paper pickers. These women live on day to day subsistence. The sole means of subsistence for them and their families is through collection of waste paper from the streets which is sold at very low rates to waste paper traders. Their earnings are low and they are harassed by the authorities as they are regarded as a public nuisance, even though they are performing a civic duty of cleaning the streets. SEWA started unionising these women so that they could be protected from harassment. The union also collected funds for providing them with bags for collecting the waste paper and aprons and gloves. These articles had the logo SEWA embossed on them and in a way they became their identity as union

members. The next step was of finding alternative employment or regular earnings for the members. Formation of cooperatives was a natural outcome of this process. At present there are two cooperatives; namely, Saundariya Sewa Mahila Cooperative and Trupti Nasta Sewa Mahila Cooperative.

Saundariya cooperative has around 500 members and is engaged in cleaning and waste paper recycling. The cooperative takes up contracts for cleaning offices and public buildings. About 150 of its members are engaged in these activities. The members are able to get a steady income and the work is more respectable than collecting waste paper from the streets.

The other activity of this cooperative is of collecting waste paper from government, municipal and other offices. In these cases too the cooperative enters into contracts with the offices for removing waste paper. The remaining members of the cooperative are engaged in this activity. Waste paper fetches much higher prices if it is sold in large bulk. The individual pickers collect small amounts which get them low prices. Moreover the price of waste paper varies according to the seasons. Hence if it is stored till the right season the price will be higher. The cooperative has therefore opened a godown for storing the collected waste paper which its members collect daily. It also tries to accommodate the paper collected by other pickers who are not a part of the cooperative but are members of SEWA. The paper is later sold through public bidding and the prices are usually two to three times more than that the pickers get if they sell to the traders.

Trupti Nasta cooperative is engaged in catering of food items. The cooperative has around 150 members who were rag pickers. It takes up contracts for supplying food at functions such as marriages, parties etc. It also runs a canteen at the Municipal Corporation Office, stalls at other offices, and supplies hot tiffin for the Integrated Child Development Project. The cooperative has organised short term courses for its members on various aspects of catering (such as display, serving etc.), cooking and nutrition.

16.3.4 Service Cooperatives

The cooperatives discussed above have helped in organising the women in improving their economic conditions by providing them regular work and an increase in income. At the same time women workers in the unorganised sector face other problems which can be overcome only through unionisation and income generating cooperatives. SEWA realised these problems soon after it started work. The union found that these women also face problems of health and of looking after their children. Ill health can cause disruption in the household income. For these women their bodies are the only means of their sustenance. If their body functions fail due to illness their means of livelihood is affected.

Taking into account this fact SEWA decided to start a health awareness programme for its members. It organised workshops for the women where they were taught about health care and their bodies. Later a scheme was developed to train volunteers from among the women who would act as health workers. These women were trained in providing basic medical care and medicines, teaching mothers about child care and nutrition. These volunteers now work full time as health workers. They perform medical check ups and provide basic medicines. A small fee ranging from Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 is charged from the patients for the medicines supplied. These volunteers later formed a health workers cooperative.

The health workers cooperative performs a number of activities. Apart from providing cheap health facilities to the women in the slums, it also runs centres in public hospitals where low cost medicines are sold. The cooperative is frequently asked to organise health awareness programmes for other

agencies. Its members also assemble medical kits for other development agencies including government sponsored ones. The fees charged for all these activities and the profits from sale of medicines are all deposited with the cooperative. These help in paying wages to the full time health workers. What is remarkable in this cooperative is that all the health workers come from the same background as the general members of the union. This cooperative has demonstrated to the women that they are capable of handling complex health problems after some training.

16.4 COOPERATIVES AND EMPOWERMENT

Through the above discussion we have tried to show that a cooperative can have a lot of potential in empowering women workers in the unorganised sector. We have deliberately chosen the example of SEWA to illustrate the specific importance of cooperatives. Empowerment comes precisely through collective action by a group of disempowered people who have similar life chances. In other words, when people having similar socioeconomic conditions come together and collectively fight for their rights they show some signs of empowerment. The qualifying factor in their struggle is that it should make them aware of their own capacities as a collective force.

Learn From Your Experience 1

Locate a cooperative in your area (fisheries, agriculture, milk products) and try to find out how they function. Also try and find what is the equation of gender in this cooperative(s). Make some notes on your enquiries and findings.

Trade unions can achieve this goal to some extent, if they function in a democratic manner, i.e., if through trade union struggles workers realise that they can change their situation by acting as a class or a collective (and not through the benevolence of individuals either within the movement or outside it) they tend towards empowerment. However, the case of SEWA shows that trade unions by themselves have limitations. All problems of the impoverished cannot be solved through trade union action alone. Other means are required as well. Cooperatives are one such means which help in furthering the process of empowerment. The experience of SEWA demonstrates to the women that apart from leading struggles against exploiters through their trade union, cooperatives perform a more positive function of demonstrating to them they are also capable of finding alternatives to the present exploitative system. The cooperatives promoted by SEWA have given confidence to the women and shown them that through their collective action they are capable of easing their economic and health problems. This is particularly important because much of the disempowerment of the low paid women in the unorganised sector is caused by lack of confidence in their own capacities. This results in making them dependent on outside agents for their existence. These dependencies can range from middle men to the system of patriarchy in society which is sustained by the lack of information and through the blind belief that they are incapable of changing their life-situations. The cases of cooperatives discussed above have in fact enabled these women to understand that nothing in life is fixed. Changes can be brought about through their own collective efforts.

It should be noted that mere formation of cooperatives is not a sufficient condition for empowerment. The women have to be trained for running the cooperatives and learning from them. Only then can they become competent in running the institutions on their own. SEWA as a union provides inputs on these aspects. It organises training programmes for the women through which they learn about the objectives of cooperation, and cooperatives.

16.5 WOMEN AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

This social environment however, as the National Commission on Self-Employed Women has pointed out, is not conducive to provide poor women the necessary economic opportunities. Poor women share several problems, which include :

- i) few opportunities to work for direct economic remuneration;
- ii) there is a greater effect on them of unemployment, and underemployment;
- iii) they lack skills and education;
- iv) their mobility is less; and
- v) they have a lack of access to better technology.

These factors ensure that such poor women are either erratically employed or unemployed depending on the circumstances faced by them. In the rural sector we find that poor women are not a simple homogenous group. There are differences among them. These women are different in terms of caste, class and type of employment, if any. They are however similar in that they are discriminated against in the family setting in terms of assets and consumption. The result is low education, health, and consumption levels.

This situation is compounded by the fact that by and large women in the unorganized sector do not own any land. Their job is to work on the land of others and rear domestic animals. They are also involved in food production, forestry, and rural industry.

Do You Know? 2

Most poor women work in construction, factories, mines, vending and so on. It is they who have to look after each detail of the household and hearth, tending to children, firewood, food, cleaning, all of which are taxing and time consuming. The deterioration of environment, including deforestation and floods affect them more than they do to men.

16.5.1 Recognition of women's work

Thus though women work for longer hours and contribute substantially to the family, they are surprisingly not regarded as 'workers' either by themselves or others, including the Government. Their productive and reproductive work is not recognized despite various debates and commissions. Government programmes designed for women do not meet their needs, nor can they reach out to all of them. The women labourers have been the most neglected lot. This is despite the recognition of their plight in the Seventh Five Year Plan. This document has acknowledged that women play an 'important role' in agricultural production, storage, marketing and processing of food, animal husbandry and so on. In addition they spend 10-12 hours on housework, as mentioned earlier. Women are also involved in supplementing household income by catching fish, small game, tailoring and so on. The irony is that these activities are not quantified economically, nor even recorded. Further new technologies have displaced women from their traditional income generating spheres. It was found that the Green Revolution led to an increase in requirements for casual labour, because small land holdings were taken over by bigger ones. The women on such holdings were ejected outwards into casual labour to become wage earners. Women are generally found in labour intensive jobs

such as transplanting rice, clearing and storing grain, picking fruits, shelling seeds of groundnut, and so on.

16.5.2 'Trickle Down' Argument

The 'trickle down' argument opined that in the planning process men and women would benefit equally, but this did not happen. This has been acknowledged in the Sixth Five Year Plan document, which states that women have been pushed due to various reasons into a low position and acknowledges their secondary place. These forces were stronger than those which tried to improve their economic situation. The attempt to alleviate poverty in the anti-poverty programmes did not succeed very much. This was due to land alienation and degradation of environment through various development projects and deforestation. There was also the concentration of resources in a few hands and an increasing polarization of the rich and the poor, on the one hand, and the rural and the urban on the other.

Think it Over 2

Why is it that the poor women have, by and large remained poor? To what extent do you think they are capable of breaking out of the vicious circle of poverty, and to be able to enjoy a higher standard of living? Pen down your thoughts on a piece of paper.

Again the attempt to improve the rural sector through land reforms did not benefit women because land was very rarely in the name of women thus land ceilings and tenancy reforms did not benefit them. Common property has been taken over by the government or privatized and this too has added an immense burden on the women, since it affects this ability to gather firewood, fetch water, and forest produce. Developmental fallout from deforestation and commercialization of forest resources have also adversely affected the lot of women.

Further agricultural poverty has led even men to migrate seeking employment outside in urban centers, leaving their families to cope best as they can. Large scale displacements have also occurred through ill conceived dam projects and industrial projects which do not take into account the fate of the environment, including the human environment. This generally leads to pauperization on a large scale in the areas concerned and leaves women without employment since rehabilitation plans do not take the plight of women into account.

16.6 GENDER BIAS

It has been pointed out that the employment sectors are biased towards the male gender. Thus, for example, the division of labour is biased against the female sex. In the cultivation of rice, men plough the land; hereafter the rest of the vast series of jobs including weeding and seed transplanting is done by women !

Similarly in the textile industry, weaving generally is done by men while women do the spinning. Again in construction men do the skilled bricklaying while women carry the tedious and heavy headloads. Studies have shown that the high wage jobs are availed of by and are the preserve of men, whereas the tedious low wage jobs are done by women. In *bidi* making women are paid less, as is also the case in industries such as coil and cashew. However even in skilled operations they are paid less than men.

Learn From Your Experience 2

Contact and talk informally to some poor women workers in construction (load carriers) or textiles (spinning). Ask them whether they realize that they are doing tedious low wage work. Note down their replies on a piece of paper, and see whether gender exploitation and its awareness is reflected in their answers.

16.6.1 The Urban Informal Sector

Further in the urban informal sector a disproportionately large number of women are in the lower paid occupations. In the organized sector 90% of the women are found in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.

Gender bias is once again at work in the field of acquiring educational and vocational skills. While the total of literate women has increased there is a vast male-female gap and women's education in technical areas is virtually stagnant. The situation is somewhat better at higher levels of enrollment in education.

The rural-urban difference in literacy rates continues to be much larger for women, the drop out rates for girls is much higher relative to boys. Thus the education policy and strategy does not reach out to the poor people including migrants, slum dwellers, landless farmers. Even in these groups the lot of women is the worst, and they have less access to education, and this has badly hindered them from attaining equality with men.

16.6.2 Social Security and Job Security

Let us look at the unorganized sector, which has grown greatly in recent years. Most of the female work force is in the informal unorganized sector. Here the structure is such that there is high incidence of casual intermittent jobs at very low wages, or self-employment with minimal returns. There are almost no social security benefits or job security. There are long hours, bad working conditions, and health hazards. Large industrial units use this to their advantage and give out piecemeal work. In the bidi industry the worker gets a pittance while the employer gets the advantage that it is a cottage industry.

16.6.3 Women as Heads of Households

We find that women are heads of households mainly in the poorer sections of Indian society. These households come about as a result of desertion, illness, addiction of males, or widowhood. The problem is that plan strategies do not recognize women as household heads. These households are at the lowest rungs of poverty. The commission feels that such households have increased.

It is quite clear that such households cannot avail of new technologies, as the poor do not have access to these skills and training. This adverse effect has had an impact also on self employed women since new technology pushes them out of the market and they may have to resort to being casual or marginal workers. Very little work has been done in technology to bring about advances which would realistically alleviate the tedium and drudgery of their household and family work.

The situation is similar in the fields of credit and marketing. The problem faced on the credit front is that women have no security to offer. Many women are not even aware of credit schemes, and not familiar with the credit procedures. As regards marketing, the competitive structure is such that old traditional products are being weeded out. Thus the synthetic nylon

rope has pushed out the grass/coir rope. Women engaged in such enterprises are joining the ranks of the unemployed.

16.6.4 The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

The SC/ST's are in an especially disadvantageous position, being socially ostracized and economically deprived for centuries. These groups are not able to make the best of government policies for lack of knowledge and access. Vested interests also create obstacles. Most SC/ST's are landless labour and work, along with their women at subsistence level. They are agricultural labourers, construction workers. They gather fuel, fodder, and water for survival. The Scheduled Tribes were forest dwellers but with environmental degradation, nationalization and reservation of forest lands, privatization of common property, the lot of the ST's is very precarious. The women who enjoyed a near equality with their men have become migrant labourers.

16.6.5 Effect of Migration on Women

Thus as the rural areas prove to be of little economic use, to many people migration becomes an established fact. This can happen due to dam projects and industrial projects as well. There are many problems if the women are left to fend for themselves. If the whole family migrates the women have to be homemakers in slums which lack even the basic sanitary facilities.



Migrating for a livelihood

Courtesy : Debal SinghaRoy, IGNOU, New Delhi

Health problems are unavoidable with low levels of income, coupled with back breaking work. Malnutrition, regretted pregnancies, and work hazards add to the problem. It must be remembered too that health services are available but they may not be available to the poor.

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16.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thus women's work is not accounted for despite their contributions being substantial. Legislation for employment are in fact of little help since new technology has only created further unemployment, especially for women. It must also be recorded that housing and childcare facilities are non-existent for a majority of the poor and they live in slums. Childcare is a must for nation building, but these facilities are few, relative to the demand. It required political will and a streamlined administration of the government to dent this problem.

Planners are well aware of women's low status and the need to focus on women's development. However between the theory and practice is a gap, which must be bridged. One of the ways in which their lot can improve is that of the cooperative movement, but this requires some level of information, knowledge, and education. Thus we have seen in this unit that the cooperative movement can lend a helping hand to poor women. We provided an example of this in SEWA cooperative and its various activities. While there are problems faced by cooperatives, we find they have a strong impact on the lives of their members. Finally we pointed out the various and enormous pressures on poor self-employed women, and the gender bias reflected in work and work situations. As such we have provided of women and cooperatives, and the problems basic outline experienced by poor women in the field of work.

16.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Cooperatives** : Business enterprises run by members who share the profits equitably.
- SEWA** : Self Employed Women's Association.
- 'Trickle Down' Argument** : The theory that economy benefits would slowly and surely reach the poor.
- Gender Bias** : Existing economic and attitudinal sets which favour one gender over the other.

16.9 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Carr, M., Chen, M., and Jhavala, R. (eds.) (1997) *Speaking Out : Women's Economic Empowerment in South Asia*. Delhi : Sage Publications.

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UNIT 17 THE ANTI ARRACK STRUGGLE

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17.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

The issue of liquor has always been very important when we consider it in the household dimension. When husbands or males of the family get drunk it leads not only to penury for poor families, but also to domestic violence across the board. In this unit we have given a case history which graphically shows the course pursued in the persistent response of women by the anti arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh. By reading this unit you will be able to:

- Understand prohibition strategies in colonial and independent India;
- Explain the role of literacy in the anti arrack struggle;
- Analyse the role of women in the struggle against arrack consumption; and
- Understand the struggle against arrack consumption.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

It would perhaps be appropriate to begin by looking at the issue of prohibition, typically women's concern historically and one which has had a long history spread out over different parts of the world. The issue of alcoholism and drunkenness is not one of isolated behavior and individual concern. It has several important social, economic, and political dimensions. The very first impact of drunkenness is felt in the family, in the arrack struggle, the women and children used to go to bed hungry, while the women were beaten badly. As such the anti arrack struggle of the women of Andhra Pradesh shows that when women make up their mind, collectively, to oppose tyranny, the results can be quite astonishing. As you will read in this unit they are capable of turning the tables through a dedicated plan of action.

In this unit we have also described and analysed prohibition in colonial and independent India and

delineated the strategies that were used. We have also studied thereafter the role of literacy in the anti arrack struggle in Andhra Pradesh. We then focus on the women's struggle against arrack, and describe both its political and militant aspect. Finally we offer some concluding remarks.

17.2 SOCIAL PURITY AND TEMPERANCE

Around the late nineteenth century a movement known as the Purity Crusade in England and America gained momentum and assumed the dimensions of a mass movement. The concern with morality and moderation extended to art and literature in which eroticism was condemned. The chief objectives of the Purity Crusade were the promotion of temperance in sexual life and with regard to alcohol. While it could be argued that the social purity movement served purely middle class interests, the values of social purity were internalised among some sections of the working class in the late nineteenth century. This involvement of the working classes was part of a conscious effort on the part of the pioneers of social purity. In the mid 1880s, women social reformers constituted chastity leagues and organised over two hundred Ladies Rescue Committees. They also addressed the need for male chastity in meetings of working class men, who were also recruited in thousands into White Cross Armies. These armies were dedicated to the promotion of a single standard of chastity and to attacking vice. There was a rationale behind this easy acceptance of the agenda of social purity by the working classes. Sexual respectability, became the hallmark of the labour aristocrat anxious to distance himself from the 'bestiality' of the casual laboring poor, as increased pressure was placed on the respectable working class to break their ties with 'outcast' groups. Other structural factors were at work as well.

Changing employment patterns seem to have re-formed patriarchal tendencies among skilled sectors of the working class. By the end of the century, the proportion of married women working outside the home declined and the wage for male workers became a demand of trade unions. Seen in this context, social purity, which called upon men to protect and control their women, served as the ideological corollary of the family wage, morally legitimating male prerogatives both inside and outside the family. Thus, social purity served to undermine working class solidarity while reinforcing conventional definitions of gender among respectable working men and working women.

Similarly Women's Christian Temperance Unions sprang up all over America in the early twentieth century. The WCTUs, unlike the Purity crusades, were church based groups of women, who held that the consumption of alcohol was linked to domestic violence. In general the moral question was being re-inscribed and moral codes rewritten in the West at this time. It is worth noting at this point that although the socio-political contexts of anti-liquor struggles all over the world have differed with historical junctures and have local specificities, anti liquor struggles have largely drawn women into political arenas and provided them with a prism that would help them to effectively articulate larger political agendas.

17.2.1 Prohibition in Colonial India

In colonial India, the movement for Social Purity had as its chief objects the total abstinence from intoxicating drinks, purity of private life, and the abolition of the devadasi system. The architect of the movement, Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu (1862-1939), started the movement for Social Purity in Madras in the 1880s. While Venkataratnam Naidu spoke about alcoholism and prostitution as twin evils, it was left to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi [1869-1948] to make prohibition an issue central to the struggle for national self-determination. However, from the beginning of the civil disobedience movement in 1930, right till provincial autonomy in 1937, prohibition was a key issue in the politics of the nationalist struggle, most notably the politics of the Congress.

Gandhi made the shift from social reform to swaraj or self-rule, taking the demand for prohibition forward. In 1929 he urged Swarajists to make total prohibition a prominent plank in the election campaign. In 1930, Gandhi declared that he was prepared to put off civil disobedience if Britain would concede to an eleven point agenda: total prohibition, restoration of the exchange rate, fifty percent reduction of land revenue, abolition of salt tax, reduction of military expenditure by 50% at least to begin with, reduction of civil service salaries by half, a protective tariff against foreign cloths, enactment of a coastal reservation bill, discharge of all political prisoners except those condemned for murder etc. He also recognised that the government was not going to concede to these demands so easily. Gandhi saw prohibition as a type of adult education of the nation that would lead to its moral awakening.

Do You Know?

Early British Policy relating to liquor consumption was one of temperance and of restricting the consumption of intoxicating drinks. From the earliest policy pronouncements of the British, one of which stated in 1905 that the government's settled policy was to minimise temptation to those who do not drink and discourage excess to those who did and in order to further this policy, all considerations of revenue must be absolutely subordinated right till 1921, when the first constitutional reforms were introduced, prohibition figured as the ultimate goal of excise policy and was passed by several state legislatures.

17.2.2 Strategies for Prohibition in Colonial India

Women participated in large numbers in the Prohibition movement spearheaded by Gandhi. Their strategies interestingly consisted in picketing liquor shops and courting arrest. Gandhi also recognised that civil disobedience to the extent of breaking salt laws alone would not satisfy women, or help them realise their full potential in the struggle for national self determination. "Let the women take up these two activities and specialise in them, and they would contribute more than men to national freedom".

They would have access to the power and self confidence to which they had hitherto been strangers. In appealing to women to spearhead the struggle for prohibition and the struggle against foreign cloth, Gandhi thus shrewdly foregrounded women as peace loving, non-violent, conciliatory and non-confrontational turning the movement into one that would in effect leave classes with vested interests without an identifiable enemy and thus disable them. Looking at Gandhi's arguments for prohibition, it is clear that what he was advocating was not merely eliminating the consumption of liquor and drugs. He saw this step as intrinsic to the process of national regeneration. The main argument was that people in drunken state were incapable of shouldering the responsibility, both moral and political, of building a nation. And women had a key role to play in this entire process of releasing men for the task of nation building.

17.2.3 Prohibition as State Policy in Independent India

Policy pronouncements in India since 1947 on the issue of prohibition have largely been a narrowing down of Gandhi's arguments to the logistics of closure of liquor production and sale in the country. Successive plan documents and policy statements reiterated what Gandhi has already said about the need for prohibition and strategies for closure as well as for alternative livelihoods for those in the liquor trade.

The important difference however, and perhaps the reasons for failure in the implementation of

plan recommendations, is that Gandhi's agenda for prohibition was a larger political statement on the need for national self determination and freedom from colonial rule. Where liquor became an issue on its own it quickly got reduced to a discussion on bureaucratic measures. There was no larger social/political issue involved, nor did the pronouncements on prohibition attempt to address the emerging problems of the rural and urban poor in any serious manner. This section will review briefly the recommendations of special committees set up in independent India as well as plan pronouncements on Prohibition. Article 47 of the Constitution, as well as the Directive Principles of State Policy direct that the states "shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of consumption, except for medicinal purpose, of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health." In keeping with this objective, the Planning Commission was entrusted with the task of working out the modalities of implementation of prohibition policy.

Think it Over 1

Do you think that it is possible to have an all-India prohibition policy today? State the reasons for your answer.

Why are women in India keener on prohibition than the men? Justify your answer.

The Second Five Year Plan reflected the concerns of the Shriman Narayan committee and included prohibition as important part of its social policy. It was during this plan period that the Central Prohibition Committee was set up. The Third Five Year Plan recognised that prohibition policy would not be successful if it was left solely in hands of the police and excise officials. It stressed the importance of the creation of public awareness, the involvement of voluntary organisations, and the availability of subsidies and nutritious food to the poor.

In 1963, the Planning Commission appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Justice Tem Chand to study Prohibition. The report of the study team was submitted in 1964. This is the most comprehensive existing document on Prohibition. Significant among its recommendations are: changes in the provision of liquor laws; electoral disqualification of persons involved in liquor offences; mass education and publicity; active role for voluntary agencies and a four phased programme culminating in total prohibition preferably by January 30, 1970.

The liquor trade which was considered a social stigma up until the late 60s and associated mostly with bootleggers, criminal and anti-social elements, started acquiring political respectability with the growing dependence of the political elite on the money and muscle power of liquor traders. By the end of the 70s the criminalisation of the political process had become rooted in liquor.

17.3 LITERACY AND THE ANTI ARRACK STRUGGLE

The National Literacy Mission (NLM), one of the five technology missions started by the Rajiv Gandhi government has taken a different trajectory in each state in the country, a trajectory that has been determined by local socio-economic conditions as well as by local politics. The history of adult literacy programmes in the state of Andhra Pradesh has been a history of failure, because these programmes have not been designed or conceptualized in a manner that makes participation intrinsic to the process. In a conscious departure from this history, the government launched the NLM officially in Nellore District on October 2, 1990. Following the Ernakulam experiment where the goal of 100 per cent literacy was achieved, the Nellore programme was modeled on the campaign approach, foregrounding issues of the development and empowerment, specifically for women, alongside enhancing skills of reading and writing.

The second stage of the mission involved the formation of an academic committee, consisting of 80 Central Resource Persons, to write the literacy primers as well as the guide books for the volunteers. The end of the second phase saw 1.5 lakh certificates being awarded in the district, of which 1 lakh were awarded to women. In order to fulfil its goal of education for development and empowerment, the post literacy phase saw the establishment of 6000 Jana Chetana Kendras or Centres for Peoples Awareness, where women played a key role in addressing and initiating debates on local problems and issues. This history is immediately relevant to the anti arrack struggle.

17.3.1 Andhra Pradesh, 1992 : The Anti Arrack Struggle

Where and how did the anti arrack struggle start? On the surface it appears as if the origins of the movement are located in the literacy programme in Doobagunta, from where it spread throughout the state. For those who wish to go a bit deeper, it soon becomes obvious that the lesson "Siripuram Sitamma" in the Aksharajyoti primer was the catalyst for Doobagunta. In that lesson, Sitamma, unable to bear the effect of liquor on the men of her village, pulled together all the women of her village in order to stop the flow of liquor into village. Women from Doobagunta, on reading this lesson decided to repeat the Aksharajyoti lesson in Doobagunta. For those who felt that a story which provided the inspiration for an entire movement could not possibly just be a story and went looking for its origins, the journey would lead to Marripadu in Rambili mandal. The effort of M. Veerayamma who mobilised women of her village against liquor, was discussed at a Mahila Mandal meeting which was attended by Murthy of the Bhagavathula Charitable Trust who in turn informed the literacy programme of the BCT. At that time members of the literacy programme were in the process of preparing the reader "Jagruti" and put this story in under the heading "Siripuram Sitamma". What then was the inspiration for Marripadu? What were the conditions which enabled women to act at the time that they did with the help of a literacy primer?



Women in Anti-Arrack struggle

Courtesy : India Today

In order to understand the reasons and the texture of the struggle, we need to go beyond the literacy programme. The struggle has to be located within the increasing resistance to an authoritarian and repressive state that was growing progressively dependent on the ruling classes. In order to maximise revenues from the sale of arrack; the Telugu Desam Government introduced the Varuna Vahini programme in the early 1980s. Arrack, upto that point available only in bottles, was now available in sachets, making it far easier to transport, and making it possible to consume increased quantities without constraints of time since packets could be carried in the pocket at any time or all the time. There was a centralising of auctioning outlets at the district level which assisted in the emergence of a whole class of liquor barons, whose interests in the liquor trade ran into crores of rupees. Individual outlets at the village level were then subcontracted to smaller agents who adopted aggressive sale strategies. For instance, the nexus between liquor traders and landowners in the rural areas made it possible for landlords to pay daily wages in the form of coupons, which could then be exchanged at liquor shops for arrack sachets.

On the other hand, there was an increasing impoverishment of the masses of rural and urban poor with the deterioration in the employment situation. There was a rise of 30 to 50 per cent in the prices of essential commodities. In this situation men, in return for a whole day's work, came back home drunk every day, with no money to buy food for the family. If one were to look at the profile of the sections that consumed arrack, one would find that most of the arrack consumed in rural areas was by agricultural labourers. This profile has a gender characteristic as well. While it is true that women, from the scheduled castes particularly, drink as well, at least in the Telangana region, women consume toddy, while arrack is largely consumed by men. Therefore, it is not surprising that it was the women of these castes and classes who rose against liquor since they bore the entire burden of excise policy.

17.3.2 Liquor and Domestic Violence

There was a sharp increase in domestic violence to hitherto unknown levels. If the reasons for the rise in violence against women are to be sought in the sharp increase in poverty, the reasons for the rise in poverty are to be sought in the economic policies of the government. The family reinforces oppression against women and perpetuates itself by subordinating women.

Summer is the time when women get a rest from agricultural work. This is also the time when they are most receptive to literacy and awareness programmes. The experience of the Doobagunta Rosamma and her sisters in Nellore, demonstrates this. Again, men were habitually drinking and obstructing meetings of the Mahila Mandal, and women were beginning to feel very strongly about this. The lesson in the primer was the spark that lit the fire. Apart from the literacy classes, they began to meet and talk at work and in the fields. The number of the deaths due to consumption of adulterated liquor was also on the increase. Women could not bear to watch their sons turning alcoholic. When beaten by the father, women imagined that their husbands would be their saviours. Soon after they began to pin all their hopes for a better life on their sons when they became victims of violence perpetrated by their husbands. When they saw their sons die prematurely, resistance was the only option open to women. Given this ground reality, the literacy primer, the Doobagunta incident and the Collector's co-operation only stoked the already smouldering fire.

17.4 WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST ARRACK

It is necessary to look at the different stages of the struggle and the complexities both in the government positions and the people's involvement. They chalked out a strategy to stop sale of liquor. They stopped sale of liquor to the extent that owners of outlets had to pack up and leave. At home, they threatened

to swallow poison if the men drank. They obstructed vehicles carrying liquor for some days. The authorities appreciated their effort and the women felt empowered. This news reached the newspapers.

Kondapuram Mandal's Saipeta village was another milestone. In May-June the struggle was confined to isolated villages. By July, 40 villages had resisted arrack. In this first stage, the Collectors and Superintendents of Police were supportive of the struggle. The women therefore did not have much to fight against. Women stopped sale of liquor in such a convincing manner that even arrack contractors were tempted to see the sense in women's arguments. It was only when the struggle began to spread from one district to another that contractors began to worry. Even then they did not think in terms of obstructing the movement. But soon contractors felt that if the struggle were allowed to continue in this fashion, they would suffer unprecedented losses, and then they began to engage police and goondas to harass the women.

Do You Know? 2

In Varikuntapadu Mandal, the contractor filed a case that a woman has stolen 56 packets of liquor. The truth was that when he was asked to close down his shop, he began selling liquor secretly in the fields. Women came to hear of this, took the sachets and burnt them. By 15 July, more shops were closed down. By 22 July, women announced a fine of Rs. 500/- to be imposed on those who drank or sold liquor. For the first time, on 22 July, there was lathi charge on women in Ravur. There was a change in the attitude of arrack contractors. They began to threaten the women with bombs, goondas and police. Women now faced an even more violent situation. But they were not deterred. By July end, out of 864 shops 200 were closed, and arrack contractors went to Hyderabad. The Excise Commissioner called the Joint Collector of Nellore ordering him to re-open arrack shops under any circumstances.

Arrack contractors informed the government and said that they would close the business down if the government refunded their deposits. The Commissioner then said that they would have to pay deposits, and that the government would provide protection for the liquor shops. The Excise Circle Inspector Shaikh Noor Mohammed opened all liquor shops in Ravur Mandal. The minute he stepped out, the women forced closure. Those who consumed liquor were given five blows. Second time offender were given ten blows, jeeps were attacked; shop owners warned and given an ultimatum. When women who had cases booked against them were required to go to the Police Station, hundreds of women joined them saying that they had picketed all roads and attacked liquor shops. The police were at a loss as to what they should do.

17.4.1 Spread of Anti Arrack Struggle

On August 3, the Jana Vignana Dedika, in a public meeting in Udayagiri Mandal gave a call for a statewide movements. From 8 August, the women started picketing not just the arrack shops but also the arrack godowns. The contractors as a result increased their pressure on the government. The excise department declared that liquor shops would be opened on 16 August and also petitioned the government that the movement had the support of the Collector, the government official in charge of administering that area, including its law and order.

With this petition Zilla offices received circulars from the government to cooperate in the opening of liquor shops. The Collector said he had no objections and that the excise department could use the help of MRO. When MROs, who upto that point were not involved in the opening of liquor shops, went to villages to do that, women pounced on them. The government resorted to various strategies to break the movement. Women were told that the state revenue would receive a set back and rations of rice and kerosene would have to be withdrawn.

Women said they could cope with the withdrawal of rice subsidy, but not with the sale of liquor, and kept forcing shops to close down. The Collector of Nellore, Raju, asked the women to keep a strict control on their husbands and said the state could not manage without the revenues from liquor. So far women thought theirs was a struggle against men and arrack contractors, but they now realised that their fight was against the government. They began to take the struggle more seriously and work more diligently for their demands. Although in general there was no role of leadership by politicians, volunteers in the Aksharajyothi programme did play leadership roles to a limited extent. The Progressive Organisation of Women [POW Stree Vimukti] led the movement in some areas. Ambedkar Yuvajana Sanghas and Members of Dalit mahasabha led the movement in other areas. However, leadership was restricted to drawing up programmes. The details and action were decided on by women, in ways that changed from one moment to the next.

Women crafted the movement as they went along experimenting with forms of protest. Women patrolled villages at night and caught offenders, decided on punishments for drunken husbands, and unearthed hidden stocks. Writing songs, writing petitions to the government etc. were programmes taken up by the Jana Chaitanaya Vedkika and other organizations including the CPM women's wing. In order to manage the work of following up on cases and looking in to the logistics of the struggle the anti arrack joint action committee was constituted. On 23 August, hundreds of liquor shops were closed in Nellore district. Women came into the struggle in increasing numbers.

At this time it became known that arrack auctions for the coming year would be held on 1 September. Different dates were fixed for different districts, thus enabling big contractors to go to any district to participate in the auctions. This angered the small contractors. Ravula Ankaiah Goud, an arrack contractor in Nellore declared that he would gather people to obstruct the auction in Nellore. He declared that he would work towards a ban on arrack, trying in the process to co-opt a struggle with opposite motives. People from all districts came to Nellore to demonstrate against auctions. However, this did not have a serious impact on women. But arrack contractors also wanted to do away with auctions. The Zilla Excise Superintendent, Kesavulu Naidu, then said that even if auctions were stopped, the state would open liquor shops mandal-wise. The government refused to be cowed down. The government said that people who bought liquor from these shops and sold it in the villages would be given licenses, that this method would be adopted in Warangal, that there would be an assured good income, and that the possibilities for doing the same had also been explored in Nellore. Women threatened that they would burn down shops and not allow sale. They had by then gained some experience in the 2 month struggle.

Think it Over 2

- 1) Do you think that women can organize against other social evils apart from alcoholism? Put your answer down on a paper.
- 2) Is it possible for women to organize against sexual harassment, unequal pay, dowry etc.? Have you any ideas how this could be done effectively?

On 11 September there was a demonstration in Nellore against auctions. From the morning onwards, women poured into Nellore. There was a lot of singing and dancing. Some women came dressed for a festive occasion; others came dressed for work. 40,000 women demanded a ban on liquor without the initiative of major political parties. The auction was postponed to 13 September. Contractors decided not to participate in auctions till 20 September. The auctions kept getting postponed.

17.4.2 The Political Aspect

The political parties that witnessed the determination of women on 11 September resolved to come to the forefront of the struggle. On 18 September, TDP, BJP & CPI(M) entered the picture in a big way. Women said the election results would depend on liquor. Jagruti, a voluntary organization filed a writ petition in High Court questioning the State's sponsorship of liquor. It also questioned some sections of the Excise laws.

Women leaders, Dr. Rama Devi, Sita Lakshmi, Sri Devi, Vijaya roamed all over the state spreading word about the meeting on 28 in Hyderabad. The High Court stay order was set aside. It was announced that auctions would again be held on 26 September. On that day there was a big struggle between women and the police at the site of the liquor auction venue to ensure that neither contractors nor officials could get inside. The police resisted, women broke barricades and entered the auction hall. Completely disregarding of themselves women fought their way into the collector's chambers to demand an end to the auction.

Learn From Your Experience 2

Make a newspaper file with cutting of the crimes that are committed and the accidents that occur due to drinking of liquor. Can you recall which famous British personality met her death in an accident in 1997, due to the driver of the car being drunk? Compare your notes/answer with other students in your study centre.

By 28 September, the anti liquor struggle had assumed more militant proportions. This served as a curtain raiser for the forthcoming meeting in Hyderabad and generated considerable enthusiasm among women. Two thousand women thronged into Hyderabad from Nellore. From October 1 the struggle of the women was directly against the government. Now the entire trade was in the hands of government.

The movement spread to eight hundred villages in a matter of months, with more than five hundred shops being forcibly closed down. Arrack auctions were postponed thirty-two times. On 14 September, the auctions were stopped by women in Ongole. The Deputy Commission Excise was gheraoed when he came to conduct and oversee the auctions, he got into the building through a rear entrance, but women got wind of it and broke barricades to enter the auction hall. In Kurnool when the police tried to stop women from picketing an auction, a mother mauled the inspector. The police instead of stopping liquor sale was attacking the women who did their job for them. On 16 September, over a thousand women marched in Kurnool to demand stopping of the liquor auction.

On 27 September, a committee was formed in Sundipenta with Millika as convener. There was a public meeting of arrack contractors. On 5 October, Lakshman, an anti liquor activist was kidnapped by liquor contractor, Reddy Rejasekhar Reddy, in Joopadu Mandal. He was handed over to the police on trumped up charges that he was selling illicit liquor. The women, however, were quick to react and Lakshman had to be released. Everyone who closed shops was harassed by contractors. On 18 October, Sandhya and her group went on a campaign tour. They were attacked by Reddy's men and told that they could not campaign against liquor. The one new thing that happened was that people in the struggle got used to visiting police stations and negotiating their demands with police officers.

17.4.3 The Militant Aspect

On coming to know that lorries bearing arrack were coming upto Sundipenta, women from 4 villages marched to the Check post outside Sundipenta to stop the lorries from entering the village. They stood guard day and night for two days. They cooked and slept there. Official's then told the women that they would send the lorries to the godown and then seal them. They assured women that they would not allow sale of liquor. The women believed them. Before the 5th, the sale of liquor had commenced in the villages. The officials had broken their word. The women attacked the shops and destroyed the packets. 26 women who picketed had cases registered against them. They were arrested and taken to be produced in the Atmakur Court. When the Magistrate ordered the release of these women and instructed that they be dropped back home, the SI left the women, already tired and hungry, stranded in Atmakur with no money and went back alone in the van. When the Chief Minister, Vijaya Bhasker Reddy went to Srisailam, 800-900 women went to submit a memorandum to him. He looked at the memorandum and said he would think about it later. The women were angry at his attitude. They demanded an immediate reply. The police removed them from there. The women then blocked the entrance to prevent the Chief Minister from moving out. The police lathi charged the crowd to make way for the car. Women kept up the propaganda against liquor. The absence of liquor had already made a significant difference in women's lives. Their household savings had increased to 300-400 rupees. There was enough food to eat. There was less fighting and violence within families and in villages. Even people who drank acknowledged this change, which continues to this day.

17.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of women's participation in the anti liquor struggle forces us to re-examine the boundaries between the home and the world, between private and public. We need to dismantle our own assumptions regarding the state and regarding the divisions between private and public. The establishment of a link between rural poor women and the state machinery at various levels, ranging from local bureaucracies to the head of state, is the hallmark of the struggle. Women were able to look closely at the structure of the ruling class and its relationship to state structures. Women now had a new perspective on the violence they were subjected to in their daily lives. So far, women's understanding of the violence in their lives was confined to the four walls of their homes; they often consented to this confinement because the persons involved were brothers, fathers and husbands; there was also the feeling that matters of the home should be confined within the home.

Gender relations within the family were reconstituted by the very fact that women now sat together not just to publicly discuss problems of survival and domestic violence, but also to talk about how they would deal with men who violated the codes of conduct that women were now laying down. One report speaks of a Muslim woman from Mahimalur who said that should her husband come home drunk, she would get half his head and moustache shaved, strap him to a donkey and parade him around the entire village. Woman began to publicly articulate the contrast between their own situation and the situation of their menfolk; of course both also suffered from very similar problems of survival that characterise the experience of their class as a whole but within this there were gender differences in both experiencies and consequences.

Thus in this unit we have considered social purity, temperance, and prohibition in colonial and independent India. We have also examined literacy and the anti arrack struggle in Andhra Pradesh in 1992. We then described the nexus between liquor and domestic violence and women's struggle

against arrack. In doing this we touched upon the spread of the anti arrack struggle including its political and militant objects. The unit shows quite clearly that women are capable of organizing and spearheading struggle when an activity, such as liquor drinking is perceived to be threatening both to the family and the social fabric.

17.6 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

Arrack	:	Country liquor.
Anchiu	:	Sale by bidding of clients.
Excise	:	a type of tax.
Gender	:	Socialization into male and female attitudes.
Logistics	:	Tactical and statistical aspect of a movement.
Moral	:	Ethical and spiritual values.
Oppression	:	Unjust suppression.
Patrol	:	Exercise in group vigilance.
Subordinating	:	To put in an inferior position.

17.7 SOME USEFUL READINGS

Tendulkar, D.G., (1969) *Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*. Vols 2-6. GOI Publication Division.

Pivar, D. (1973) *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control*. 1868-1900. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

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UNIT 18 WRITING A PROJECT REPORT

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18.0 AIMS AND PURPOSE

The writing of a research report is the final stage of the research itself and forms an integral part of it. It can be done only after the data pertaining to the research has been collected, integrated and analysed. The report itself contains a brief account of all the various procedures adopted by the researcher. The aim of the report is to make you understand the relevance of :

- The target group;
- The various styles or type of reports;
- Contents of a report—its preliminary, main body, and referencing the report;
- Ethical aspects of a report and the publishing of a report; and
- Impact and use of a report.

The purpose of writing a research report is to provide the concerned target group, or the audience, the salient points concerning the research so that they can have in one compact document the entire range within the research topic investigated. It is to enable others to be able to study the research work and be able to comment upon it. Research is a venture in which the researcher should be aware of those literate in the field, and be able to put his or her own research into a proper context within a body of related knowledge. This is essential if the research is to contribute further to the subject under discussion and the formulation of further hypotheses. Thus the purpose of research report is to provide fellow researchers, at home and abroad with the methods, theories, data interpretation and analysis of the report, complete with references and bibliography.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In research work in the social sciences a greater deal of information is shared through seminars,

conventions, discussions, and correspondence. These modalities are very useful and effective in passing information at relatively earlier stages of the research work when hypotheses are still tentative and the precise direction is still being sought. These procedures fill in a gap between the actual field work and its formation into a report. The fact however is that researchers have to depend ultimately on published reports, which go beyond the local setting. Such a procedure also helps the researcher realize the importance of his/her communication as when the appreciation and criticism, which follows publication comes in then it is necessary to take stock of the research that has been executed.

In this unit we have begun by introducing the idea of the audience or the target preference group to which the research is conceptually directed. Next we refer to the style or the types of report which can be used to present the entire procedure in different ways depending on the content of report. We then go on to the actual contents of the report, and then discuss the various preliminaries of the report, its major section, and the facts the researcher needs to know to do the referencing of the report. These are technicalities that the researcher must know to present the report including the vastly important aspects of the ethics of report writing and publishing the report. Finally we make some concluding remarks on the impact and use of the report.

18.2 THE AUDIENCE OR TARGET GROUP

The way and method that a researcher presents his report is not done only by keeping his problem, data collection and analytical mode in perspective, but also and very importantly by his target or prospective audience. The question of commitment to a particular standpoint is what determines to whom he or she is keen to reach out. Thus some researchers, no matter what their relation to wider society, may write only for their own organization. There are researchers who write to influence public policy, and the family counsellor who writes on the interactional problems of everyday life. However, this is not all—there can be a sub-audience that is also addressed. The researcher may thus address himself or herself to a few or to a mass audience. It is obvious then that writing for other researchers is different from writing for a large number of people.

Think it over 1

Why do you think it is necessary for a researcher to have a target audience in mind? Note down your answer on a sheet of paper.

One of the major problems regarding these types of research writing is that social scientists write mainly for their colleagues but because of that they can reflect in greater detail upon their topic of concern. The mass oriented writer obviously has to write in a popular mode, over simplifying the problem in order to reach out to a larger group of people. This position may to some extent be an exaggeration but it is well founded. This is because researchers reaching mass audiences, would have to steer clear of controversial areas, and also make generalizations that are not usually qualified.

What has been called the elite/mass divide coincides with the type of methodology which is used in the social sciences. Researchers who use refined and elaborate methods may be unwilling, and also unable, to present their findings in a way that would attract wide audiences. It would be very difficult to use sensitising concepts to make their reports more popular. It must be noted however that certain increases in sophisticated and more educated audiences, make it easier for the researcher

to communicate technical details and acute analysis. On the other hand the methodology of some researchers make it easier for them to use concepts in an intuitive manner, without doing harm to standards of sound scholarship. There is thus every possibility of using social science research to appeal to wider audiences, but we must be clear as to who the audience is. Social scientists have tried to reach out for a middle-way between these two extreme positions. Thus it is essential to not to make a social science report so technicalized with statistics and jargon that it would ordinarily be inaccessible to the interested layman, on the other hand, it is important that the report is not completely distorted in the interests of communicating with the general reader.



Gathering information- a field worker

One of the important features of writing generally, is that such work is not accepted in journals and technical publications, which do not generally recognize a 'verstehen' approach. Also general approaches do not usually permit scholarly criticism. Thus the style of the report depends on the audience in mind, and has precise consequences which follow from the decision to write for a scholarly elite or the general masses. There is another important issue in the field of report writing, and this is the issue of jargon. This technical terminology often prevents it from being understood by a large number of people and thereby provides a limited understanding, available only to social scientists. Such jargonistic terminology can tax the patience of the reader, but there is no doubt that some technical words have acquired a special meaning and cannot be discarded. Further some of the masters of sociology have themselves used a plethora of terms that are difficult to understand. Thus the matter jargon, is still an open question, and it is clear if the research is addressing fellow researchers he or she can be freer with the use of jargon, than if his order audience is general and unfamiliar with the terminology of 'jargon'.

18.3 THE CONTENTS OF A REPORT

The content of report whether a dissertation, thesis, or a larger scale report is to be presented in a specific way if it is to be useful. The content of a report has different sections. Just like an essay must have a beginning, a middle and an ending, the research report has its preliminaries, its major section and the references. These are not difficult in themselves but it is important to know precisely what they are. Let us turn to a description of the preliminary section, following that to the major section and then the reference section of a research report.

18.4 PRELIMINARY SECTION

The first part of the preliminary section is the title page which includes the information concerning the title of the study and the name of the author. The name of the faculty and institution and to whom the report is being submitted is also given. The purpose for which the report is being submitted is also given. Finally the date of submission is presented. Next there is an approval sheet in which a certificate for authenticity is given by the supervisor.

This is followed by a preface which is really a statement about the research, and in what way it hopes to contribute to the subject. After the preface comes the acknowledgement of those people and the institution which helped in the research. Usually the acknowledgement is restrained and avoids emotionalism and sentimentality, so as to reflect the social science ethos of objectivity and impartiality. Next to the acknowledgement is the contents page which contains the entire scheme in which the research report/work has been divided complete which subsections, reference and so on. It is a comprehensive statement of the entire work, chapter by chapter, and the pages on which these sections and chapters begin.

If there are tables and figures or illustrations they are given on a page following the contents page, and page numbers are also given correspondingly.

18.4.1 Major Sections of a Report

The major portion or the main body of the report is itself divided into various parts which we denote through bold letters.

Statement of the Project. The introduction of the research forms the first chapter of the report. The problem that was undertaken for research is to be stated clearly. In the case of a sociological study the relevant details of the fieldwork should also be given including the area studied and the time spent in the field, difficulties encountered and so on. This part of the report provides the minimum orientation to what has to be studied and must be stated after due study and deliberation. It includes within itself various subfactors such as the :

- i) importance of the investigation and a statement of the purpose of the study.
- ii) the limitations of the study also be reflected and reported upon.
- iii) it is also important that central concepts are clearly set forth and delineated so that the target audience has a good idea about the discussion and presentation that is to follow.

- iv) the hypothesis can be given at this stage but some reports in Social Science may not present a hypothesis in the beginning and prefer to arrive at an inference at the end of the study.

Learn From Your Experience 1

Select a topic such as "women and empowerment" and make a statement of the research that you would expect to go into it. What method of research would you use?

We now come to another area within the Introduction section of the report. This is the discussion of the literature in the relevant area of research. This is important in establishing the relevance of the study in that it establishes the particular field of study that has been taken up. Within this, the researcher establishes the particular points of departure for the study, the areas of continuity and which particular area he or she would like to focus upon in the ensuing work. The discussion of literature must be structured logically and preferably some idea of chronology should be kept. The areas which have not been hitherto focussed upon have to be stressed, and the areas that have not been touched upon at all, should also be highlighted relative to the report that is being presented. Thus this procedure clearly delineates the overall significance of the investigation and states what precisely the research is.

This brings us to another important area of the Introduction, and this is the **explication of the methodology**. This is a very important section which establishes early in the report the credentials of the entire study. If the researcher cannot convincingly show how he or she has approached the problem and what have been the methodological tools, the entire report fails to convince the reader of the various methods used for social scientific enquiry, such as participant field work, pure observation, participant as observer, or observer as participant, it becomes important to indicate the precise position(s) taken, and the circumstances under which this was done.

Do You Know ? 1

Jargon (or technical vocabulary) may under certain conditions serve a rather unique function. One of its functions in a dictatorship or a totalitarian regime is the ability to express much more candidly than would be possible in easy, non-technical language. This is because the persons who censor the published material would let material targeted to a specialized audience be distributed—but would not allow writings which have a mass appeal and could cause discontent or break down in law and order to be circulated.

There are related methods such as the interview, questionnaires, case study and so on. These must be specified. The use of the particular method must also be justified with acute and logical reasoning. It is also the practice to append the relevant questionnaires or schedules used at the end of the chapter or in the appendixes to the report. This provides an idea as to the concerns that guided the research, and as to how well the questionnaire was constructed.

Normally after the methodological sections have been explained as part of the Introduction, the work moves on to the various chapter/sections of the report which **describe and analyse the data**. In a social scientific report, and especially one in Sociology, the data has to be presented very clearly. At the same time it has to be related to earlier and contemporary work in the work of the field of presentation. That is to say each chapter/section of the report has to provide the

adequate data and descriptions for the work that is being pursued **within a context**, and this context is defined by the work already available in the area of interest that is being presented. This is the way in which the comparative aspect which is both intrinsic and extrinsic, the study would be pointless and be a statement in the vacuum. The only area to which this does not apply is an area where little or no work has been done. Thus pioneering studies are justified to some extent in that they have less of an established context to work upon, but in modern times there is seldom an area of social interest whether there is no related literature. Finally there can be use of tables, graphs, and diagrams which should be used to enhance the discussion and not merely to try and provide data that has little or no relation to the study that is being pursued. Finally the use of illustrations, pictorial or otherwise, especially in social anthropology add greatly to the value of contextualization. Once the description and analysis have been presented, we find the time has come to consolidate the findings. This is then done in the form of the concluding chapter.

Learn From Your Experience 2

Study the conclusion in a published research report, and note down its essential characteristics. Make a note of your study.

The concluding chapter of research report is not a mere recounting of what has gone earlier into the report. It must in fact go beyond and arrive at inferences, conclusions and suggestions on the basis of what has been presented earlier. This is what gives the concluding chapter its significance. It is an opportunity to categorically show that the statements made in the Introduction are actually correct and that the research report does in fact contribute to the overall debate in the area concerned. However this section must not be unnecessarily isolated from earlier or contemporary work, but build a bridge to them. Thus the concluding chapter builds general and specific conclusions, and attempts to make relevant suggestions. There are research reports where this is the most important part of their overall contribution. Much research is sponsored in order to get specific suggestions and recommendations from the researcher. However, even in reports undertaken for institutions and for research degrees the role of constructive generalizations and suggestions cannot be undermined. Thus the conclusion is an entire chapter devoted to the problem which has been examined, presented, and analysed throughout the report. It would not be wrong to point out that a weak and badly argued concluding chapter can mar the entire investigation. The originality and analytical capacities of a researcher are clearly in evidence in the manner of tackling this section.

18.4.2 Referencing the Report

Throughout the study or research report certain references have to be made by the researcher and these have been made explicit at the end of each chapter, or at the end of the work there is a specific way in which this is done and can be presented in terms of the headings 'References and Notes', 'Bibliography', 'Appendix' and 'Index'. These provide the list of the sources which have been mentioned only in abbreviated form during the text. For example (Marshal: 1952) in the text would have to be clarified in the references fully as : T.N. Marshal, (1952). **The Principles of Sociology**, Guarda Press, Taiwan. This would be done for each of the books referred to. Another method of referencing uses the elevated numerical system. Thus we have mentioned that field work provides a basic ingress to data in the field. Here the elevated number could refer to either a book or a note, and in the reference section the entire book, with all publication details will have to be given.

Think it over 2

Is it really necessary to reference a research work? Why don't newspapers and magazines use referencing in their news reports?

Whether author and year of publication are used in referencing or the elevated numerical prefix is used is a matter of precedent or specific requirements. Reports prepared for a specific purpose may have to follow the "house style" of the publisher or journal in which they hope to be finally published. Thus notes and references are given in a continuous sequence and clarified at the end of the chapter/report; on the other hand they can be given at the bottom of the page on which they appear. Footnotes should be to the point and should not ramble on into generalities.

Thus notes/footnotes could be further clarifications of a point or simply be the publication details of a reference. Regarding referencing there are some standard notations which help in making this section concise. They are part of the social science repertoire and we will acquaint you with some of these practices so that your report is precise and acceptable. Since knowledge of referencing is an absolute requirement for anyone writing a research report the researcher should be aware of some of the standard referencing techniques, thus the list below has some of the abbreviations which are often used. They are:

anon.	—	The author is unknown
cf.	—	Compare
Ch. Chap.	—	Chapter
Col., cols.	—	Columns
ed.	—	edition
et.al	—	and other
fig., figs	—	figure(s)
ibid.	—	Same reference
idem.	—	same person
illus.	—	illustrated
infra.	—	below
loc. cit	—	the cited place
mimeo.	—	mimeographed
MS.	—	Manuscript
n.d.	—	no date given
n.p.	—	no place
op.cit.	—	previously cited
Supra	—	above
Vide	—	see.

Sources for a book can be listed as below:

Ragda, Terje (1978). *Nature and Man* (1st ed.) Stockholm. Persecution Press. pp. 27-32.

That is surname of the writer, name of author, year of publication, title (underlined), edition, place of publication, publishers, pages.

In case of an article we have the following style.

Davis, Miles (1954). "Rejection and Society: A Study of Bankers". Down Beat Vol. No. 10. 27 p. 79.

(Surname of writer, name of writer, title of article, title of periodical (underlined) Volume, Number, page(s).

Similarly, we can use this methodology for the referencing of unpublished materials, such as a thesis or dissertation or a newspaper. Moreover it would help that given this knowledge the learner would study the reference section of a standard research study. The bibliography differs from the references in that the former is done in an alphabetical order and has a wider frame. That is to say the bibliography can include a vast range of work that has a comparative value for other scholars who would be interested in the subject under consideration. It goes beyond the scope of references which must have a near perfect compilation with the point being made at a specific place. Referencing is thus a provision of the direct or approximate area from which the point is drawn or to which it has similarity. It confirms the context of the argument. The bibliography locates the study in a much more general body of work and provides scope for further study. It also indicates the awareness of the report writer.

18.5 FURTHER ASPECTS OF REPORT WRITING

At this point it is important to dwell upon certain factors of report writing which limit the scope of a report. That is to say while ideally a researcher should be able to freely communicate the findings, this is not possible because a researcher has to take into account his or her societal environment. The strictures upon a researcher can come from the way his or her discourse aligns itself to one or other school of thought. This can impose limits on what is said. Some researchers write specifically to underscore a particular viewpoint and thereby face criticism from the other perspectives.

The limitations that arise from the political aspects of the research are the most powerful. Sometimes these are imposed by the agencies that fund the research. Even if research that is politically controversial is carried out it may not find a suitable publisher. Sometimes the researcher attempts to circumvent detection of controversial intent by using jargon. The solution would be to take a middle position in which the intention of the writer is understood by a wider section of people and not just experts.

18.5.1 Ethical Considerations

Thus we come to a crucial point in reporting the investigation. There are some initial considerations which draw attention to themselves, and these are:

- i) the researcher's commitment to the people that have been studied.
- ii) commitment to society at large.
- iii) the researcher's commitments to his or her colleagues.

Researchers have commitment to their sources of knowledge (informants). However it is here that the problem emerges. Should the sources of information, the informants always be kept 'anonymous' There is no definite answer. It may be absolutely necessary in studies in which the researcher feels that the informant could be harassed or the personal privacy of the informant may be disturbed. This anonymity is often guarded by changing the name of the informant. Indeed sociologists and anthropologists often change the name of an entire village and ensure that it cannot be reached by anyone else. In other instances, the requirement for anonymity may not seem necessary. In yet other cases, it becomes difficult to decide whether protection of identity of the informant is necessary or not.

Do You Know? 2

The protection of the informant's identity is one of the key problems in social scientific research. The question is whether the anonymity of respondents should always be maintained, and if so how? This question has been much debated and each researcher has to strike a balance between total anonymity and partial revelation.

One of the reasons why confidentiality is often kept in sociological studies is that if they identify the field, and the informant(s) identity is revealed, the source of information can easily get distorted or dry up altogether. If anyone interested in critiquing the study can go to the field and identify the informants, they may be under pressure to change or qualify their statements, merely to prevent fermenting trouble for themselves and their community. Thus even if the informant himself or herself gives permission for his or her name to be used, the researcher should not go by that freedom to do so. This is especially so in village studies where the informants may not understand the consequences of this permission. When anthropologists have actually given names of their informants, it has been when they were sure that the communities they studied could not be reached and were thus safe from the spread of such knowledge.

This problem has been resolved in various ways, but the most widely used norm is to not be specific about where, when, and how a given reference of knowledge occurred. Yet other sociologists and psychologists provide fictitious identities to their field of study, the people and their informants. The creation of fictitious entities is justified on the ground that the researcher is interested in patterns or processes, and not in specific messages. It also has consequence of the findings never being replicated.

Finally we may mention that misquotation of informant's, manipulation of data, the omission of important data are also delicate ethical questions, and show us that social science is a difficult area of endeavour. Maintaining fictitious identities also means there is no way of checking on the accuracy of a researcher's findings.

18.5.2 Publishing the Report

One of the normal consequences of a research report is to publish part of it in a journal or to publish the entire MS in book form.

Journals and book publishers have their editorial panel of experts who examine the manuscript. Further journals have their own house style, and different levels of prestige.

The level of prestige of any particular publishing house or journal depends on the editorial board and the 'reach' of the publication. This is to say that verification often sets in and the lesser known

publishers or journals have no bar on contributions by quality authors. Often the editors represent a single viewpoint and will not admit any other, no matter how well researched. Thus the researcher should not get disheartened by a few rejection slips.

18.6 Concluding Remarks

Research is an exacting activity with many facets, and writing a research report demands a high level of skill. Even then there are few works that are hailed as important contributions to knowledge. A position of importance and influence helps in a work being published, disseminated, and praised. However little research has gone into what makes a research work a success on publication.

Thus in this unit we began with a discussion on target or audience group. We then went on to present the style and types of report. Next we went into the heart of the research report and secured the 'contents', including the preliminaries, the major sections and the various aspects of referencing. After this we looked into some very important aspects of writing a research report. These are the aspects of ethicality and publishing relative to a research report. We have thus covered the topic adequately and provided the relevant information on writing a research report.

18.7 CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS USED

- Bibliography** : an alphabetically ordered list of books pertaining to a single subject.
- Confidentiality** : keeping the source information received secret.
- Ethical** : Relating to values and norms.
- Jargon** : technical language of a subject.
- Objectivity** : free from prejudice and partiality.

18.8 SOME USEFUL READINGS

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