

# **HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

Tenth Edition 2015-16

**Compulsory Paper**



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**Question Bank  
With Answers**



**Jai Bharath Prakashana  
Mangalore**

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# **HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

**[COMPULSORY PAPER]**

**For All the Degree Students of the State**

**Covers Entire Syllabus [2006 - 2007] of II Semester  
Compulsory Paper of the MANGALORE UNIVERSITY**

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**BY**

**Dr. Parvathy Appaiah**

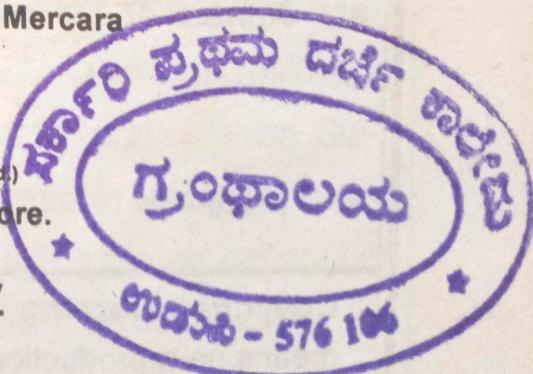
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"Let Noble Thoughts Come to us From All Sides" - RIG VEDA

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**JAI BHARATH PRAKASHANA, MANGALORE.**

## (B) GENDER EQUITY

[The below mentioned is not only the content of the book but also the syllabus prescribed by the Mangalore University]

Max. Marks : 20

16 Hours

Page No.s

37 - 54

### UNIT - I

#### Key Concepts [2 Hours]

1. Sex and Gender.
2. Masculinity and Femininity.
3. Patriarchy, Matriarchy
4. Gender Roles & Attributes, Gender Division of Labour.
5. Gender bias.
6. Gender Stereotypes.
7. Need for Gender Sensitization.

### UNIT - II

#### Women's Status in India [2 Hours]

55 - 68

1. Important indicators.
2. Sex Ratio, Education, Health, Nutrition, Maternal and Infant Mortality, Work Participation Rates and Political Participation.

### UNIT III

#### Contemporary Women's Issues [6 Hours]

69 - 86

1. Discrimination Against Girl Child.
2. Violence Against Women.
3. Problems of Health and Nutrition.
4. Women's Education and Gender Bias in Education.
5. Trafficking in Women.
6. Globalization and Impact on Women.

### UNIT IV

#### State Initiatives for Gender Equity [6 Hours]

87 - 103

1. Constitutional Rights of Women
2. Laws Pertaining to Women
3. The National and State Commissions for Women.

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

1. Usha Sharma : *Gender Mainstreaming & Women's Rights*.
2. Mohini Chatterjee : *Feminism and Gender Equity*
3. Neera Desai & Maithreyi Krishnaraj : *Women's Studies in India : Some Perspectives*, Popular Prakashana, Mumbai 1986.
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#### Bibliography

#### Question Bank

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# **GENDER EQUITY**

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- KEY CONCEPTS**
- WOMEN'S STATUS  
IN INDIA**
- CONTEMPORARY  
WOMEN'S ISSUES**
- STATE INITIATIVES FOR  
GENDER EQUITY**



# GENDER EQUITY

## INTRODUCTION

It is customary everywhere to classify the human community on the basis of sex into groups of 'men' and 'women'. The biological fact of sex has created much difference between them. The aims and objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress styles and behavioural patterns, roles and statuses of men and women are different. No where in the history of humanity men and women were treated alike and assigned statuses alike. Women have not been able to lead a life exactly on par with men in spite of their urge for equality. This does not mean that men and women represent two different cultures as such. They represent one way of life, one culture and one heritage. This is also true of India and Indian women.

*The type of the status assigned to women in any society reflects the nature of its cultural richness and the level of its civilisational standards.* Hence **Swami Vivekananda** said, "that country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever in future". The degree of freedom and respectability given to women to move about and take part in public activities gives a good idea of the nature of the society to which they belong. The status accorded to women in society symbolises its level of progress. The quality of a civilisation can be assessed by the way in which women are treated by the members of that civilisation.

### Women in the Indian Society

Women in the ancient world, in general, lived a life of subjugation and total surrender to men. Their position was only "secondary" and they hardly enjoyed rights and opportunities on par with men. But women in ancient India, particularly during the Vedic period, enjoyed a position which was on the whole much more satisfactory than in the later periods. Women

underwent almost a kind of servitude during the Medieval period and their position went on slowly improving during the British period and after independence. Today, Indian women are almost assigned an equal status with men. All their political, economic, educational and other disabilities have been removed legally.

### Women in Independent India

The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the political and legal changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes, exploitation of women was reduced to a great extent. More freedom and better orientation were provided to the women's organizations to pursue their interests. Importance of researches, national policies and programmes focused on women came to be increasingly realised. Several commissions were appointed by the Central and State governments to study the causes of low status of women and to protect their rights in various fields. The celebration of "*International Women's Year*" in 1975 and the activities of UNESCO created awareness of the problems of women.

Women who constitute almost 50% of the total population of the country have a crucial role to play in its development and progress. Our commonsense, experience and general observation reveal to us that our women are not able to contribute their real mite to the developmental works. This does not mean that our women are unwilling to play their role, it only means that the present socio-economic and political set-up is not conducive and favourable for them to prove their mettle.

### Increasing Concern Towards Women's Issues

Indian women were formally granted equality in political rights through the Constitution in 1950. For another 25 years [up to 1975], women remained just the recipients of state's social welfare without any special focus on the gender inequalities. Neither the media nor individual leaders and organisations bothered much to entertain debates relating to the cause and concern of women. Since the late 1970s, women-related

issues have gained visibility. Both inside and outside the country, issues affecting the interests of women started assuming prominence in the print media, electronic media and also in public platforms and international forums. National and international policy documents now acknowledge that “*gender discrimination*” is one of the most pervading forms of institutionalised deprivation affecting primarily women’s interests. Attempts have been made to scrutinise the existing ‘*gender bias*’ in different areas and collect statistics regarding issues affecting women. Anti-discriminatory laws were passed, a number of new policies were undertaken and new projects and programmes were launched for the advancement of women.

### **The Darker Side of the Issue**

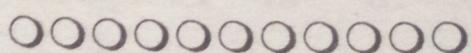
Despite governmental concern and official attention to these issues of women and development, a large proportion of women living in the country both, in the rural and urban areas, continue to experience and suffer from acute inequalities, deprivation, exploitation and violence. Official and unofficial data collected and various indicators applied to assess the position of women, reveal that only a small number of women have been benefited from these measures. Majority of women still occupy a lower status than men in power, wealth and opportunity. Exclusion of women from the benefits of development and the state’s inability to counter the prevailing sexual stereotypes have made the achievement of the goal of equality for women, a dream.

### **Need for a Change in the Perspective Towards Women**

There is an increasing awareness today, at least at the level of the educated, that women have a great positive participatory role to play in the progress of the nation. At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that any positive change in the position of women cannot be brought about without addressing their present position either at home or at workplace, or in any sphere of activity in which women are found functioning. Women’s rights are to be properly recognised and their equality respected. Women’s relations with others in the family and in the larger society are to be understood with this perspective.

## Social Transformation Through Empowerment of Women

State's welfare approach to women to promote their interest, though is a right step towards the betterment of women, it alone is not sufficient. Women are to be properly empowered socially, economically and politically so that they will be able to play their participatory role in an effective manner. All developmental programmes, plans and schemes can fetch tangible benefits to women only if they are empowered. Thus, there is a greater recognition that social, economic and political empowerment is the only way to bring social transformation in the society. It is high time that discriminatory and unequal laws are set right. Problems confronting women should not be treated as only "women's problems", but as "*societal problems*" and should be countered and resolved. The evil effects of gender bias, and gender stereotypes must be made known to the younger generation. The entire society is to be properly awakened on the issue of *gender equity or equality*. Gender equity is not studying about gender, nor about the differences between two genders. *Gender equity, is indeed, an academic response to the need to understand, analyse and remedy gender inequality.* The purpose of gender equality is not to establish the supremacy or superiority of any one gender, but *to establish a society which is free from gender discrimination.* This requires a general awakening in the society. The media, the educational institutions, the NGOs, the intellectuals of the society, opinion creators, political and socio religious leaders have an important role to play in this process of awakening.



## UNIT I

# GENDER EQUITY : KEY CONCEPTS

- 1. Sex and Gender
- 3. Patriarchy and Matriarchy
- 5. Gender Division of Labour
- 7. Gender Stereotypes
- 2. Masculinity and Femininity
- 4. Gender Roles & Attributes
- 6. Gender Bias
- 8. Need for Gender Sensitization

The world has been witnessing vital changes in various realms of human life for the past one hundred years. In the realm of relations between men and women also significant developments have taken place. There was a time when women were regarded as subservient to men and women's rights, liberty, interests, aspirations, choices, preferences, etc. were either suppressed or never recognised. Men dominated the scene. They claimed supremacy, superiority and superordination over women. But things have changed today due to the increased general awakening towards the rights of women. Women have now emerged as a vital social force. Wherever they got the opportunity, they showed their talents and proved their ability. Social consciousness is emerging in the community of women.

Achievements of women in the fields such as politics, economy, education, medicine, research, science, technology, art, literature, sports, fine arts, humanities etc., compelled men to change their approach towards women. The present approach is to treat women on par with men. The belief that men and women are born equal and they should always be treated so, pervades the whole universe. Providing equal rights, opportunities and statuses to women on par with men is essential and legally and morally mandatory. A powerful advocacy and justification of this approach is known as "feminism".<sup>1</sup>

Though feminism as a movement took its birth in the west, its influence has spread, although not equally, all over the world. Due to the growing awareness among women, concepts such as "women studies", "women's issues",

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1. A social movement launched in support of these views under the leadership of women is called "feminist movement", or "women's movement", or "women's liberation movement" [and also briefly as "women's lib movement"] For more details see C.N. Shankar Rao's "Sociology - Principles of Sociology With an Introduction to Social Thought" - 2006 Edition - Pages : 831-833.

"women's problems", "women's interests", "women's cause", etc., are being profusely used today. Deep studies, researches, surveys, investigations, observations, etc., focused on women related issues are being carried on seriously. The main insistence of this new approach is that *sex differences* [difference between men and women] are nature-made, or biological; while *gender differences* [difference between masculinity and femininity] are human made or socially or culturally created.

Biological differences between men and women are not the causes of gender differences and definitely should not be of gender discrimination. It is now widely felt that this fact must be made known to all, particularly to the younger generation. Due importance is now being paid in the preparation of the school curriculum to introduce lessons that would help the children to develop proper perspective regarding individuals of the opposite sex.

The present chapter is only an attempt to introduce some key concepts such as '*sex and gender*', *masculinity and femininity*, *gender bias* and *stereotypes*, *gender roles*, etc., which are of great importance in understanding the philosophy of gender equity or equality. Explanations and examples are also given here to clarify the meaning of and differences between the various mutually related concepts.

## 1. SEX AND GENDER

The terms '*sex*' and '*gender*' are often used by modern people in their conversations indiscriminately without making any specific differences between the two. But difference between the two is of great importance in our discussion of "*gender equity*".

It was Ann Oakley, who introduced the term "*gender*" to sociology. According to Oakley, '*sex*' refers to the biological division into male and female, while "*gender*" implies the socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity. "*Male*" and "*female*" are *sex categories*, while "*masculine*" and "*feminine*" are *gender categories*.

### Meaning of Sex

- The term '*sex*' implies a biological difference between men and women. It is a biological factor that makes males and females different from each other. It reveals a biological perspective.

Just as in the animal society we find animals of both the sexes, that is, males and females, human society too consists of men and women,

that is, individuals of both the sexes. The societal principle of difference also includes sex difference. All human societies attach great importance to sex differences.

On the basis of the *biological factor of sex*, human society is divided into two groups or communities [community of men and community of women] every where. Primary physical traits such as reproductive organs, body shape and secondary physical traits such as facial hair, muscular strength, etc., are helpful in making such a division or classification.

Sex, though is a biological factor, has a psychological dimension. The factor of sex draws men and women together and welds them into a unity in the name of love, marriage, desire for children, family and so on. From the point of view of the human beings, sex is not just a factor of reproduction, it is something more than that. It has social, sociological, psychological and cultural dimensions also. Sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, moralists and religious leaders have stressed in several ways the importance of sex to the human society and to its members.

### **Meaning of Gender**

1. 'Gender' refers "... to the socially constructed aspects of differences between women and men."<sup>1</sup>
2. The sociological meaning of the term 'gender' refers to "cultural ideas that construct images and expectations of females and males."<sup>2</sup>
3. 'Gender' refers "to the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being male or female." - John J. Macionis.

***Gender is Culture Based and Not Biologically Determined :*** It is clear from the above definitions that "gender" has no biological grounding, it is rooted in culture. Gender is seen as culturally and historically relative. Thus, its meaning and interpretation may differ with time, region and culture. As anthropologists like Margaret Mead and psychologists have stressed that *gender is not biologically determined but socially and culturally defined*. Thus, there is no typical "male dress" or "female dress"; "man's interest" or "woman's interest"; "male job" or "female job", 'male style' or 'female style' as such determined by the biological factor of sex. If such things do exist, it is because, they are developed due to cultural reasons and reinforced through persistent social training or socialisation.

1. "The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology", 1998 - Page : 250.

2. "The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology" - Page : 251.

*For example, in the Indian context, men wear 'panche' or 'dhoti', whereas women wear saree and blouse.* Similarly, especially in the rural areas, women do the cooking work and lookafter children, whereas men carry on agricultural work such as ploughing. If this is so, it is not because of any predetermined and unchangeable biological laws, but because of cultural practice which can very well be changed or even reversed.

It is clear from the above, that 'gender' is a dimension of social organisation, shaping how we interact with others and how we think about ourselves. It only reveals a cultural attribute and not a physical one.

**Gender Stratification :** Further, gender also involves a hierarchy, that is, ranking men and women differently in terms of power, wealth, and other resources. It is for this reason, sociologists speak of gender stratification also. Such type of *gender stratification* refers to "*the unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege between men and women.*"<sup>1</sup> Gender thus affects the opportunities and constraints each of us faces throughout our life.

## 2. MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Just as the two words "male" and "female" represent sex categories, two other words such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' represent 'gender categories', or 'gender identity'.

**Gender identity** refers to the sexual image of the individuals. Biological differences between men and women contribute to the development of "gender identity", which refers to the self-concept of a person being male or female. Human beings learn this gender-identity at a very early age. Generally, a child learns that 'she is a girl' or 'he is a boy' between the age of 18 months and 36 months [or 3 years].

Every society has its own cultural definition of what it means by 'man' or 'woman'. The two terms 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are often used to refer to the degree to which individuals see themselves as 'masculine' and 'feminine' depending on societal definition.

Thus, the word '**femininity**' in its usage, is contrasted with '**masculinity**' and represents the distinctive ways of acting, behaving and feeling

1. J.J. Macionis in "Sociology" - Page : 325.

on the part of women. In simple, it reveals *female personality traits*. In the same way, the word '**masculinity**' which is contrasted with '*femininity*' represents characteristics or behaviour appropriate to male sex. In brief, it denotes *male personality traits*.

Femininity and masculinity, as it is made clear from the above, have only social roots and not the biological ones. Members of a society or culture only decide as to what do they mean by a "*male*" or "*female*". For example, in a society, if males are regarded as *brave, dominant, dashing, providers for the family*, and so on, all men in that society will generally respond by defining themselves as "*masculine*". Similarly, in a society, if females are regarded as *timid, passive, emotional, homemakers*, and so on, all women in that society will generally define themselves as "*feminine*" on the basis of these defined qualities. [See Table No. 1] These are only social or cultural definitions, and in reality, it is very much possible for one to be female and see herself as masculine; or male and see himself as feminine.

### The so called '*Feminine*' and '*Masculine*' Qualities are Not Inborn Biological Traits

Margaret Mead, a famous American anthropologist, in her "*Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*" has tried to prove that some traits which we call "*masculine*" and some others "*feminine*" do not nec-

Table No. 1

#### SOME TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF GENDER IDENTITY

Feminine Traits	Masculine Traits
Submissive	Dominant
Dependent	Independent
Unintelligent and incapable	Intelligent and competent
Emotional	Rational
Receptive	Assertive
Intuitive	Analytical
Weak	Strong
Timid	Brave
Content	Ambitious
Passive	Active
Cooperative	Competitive
Sensitive	Insensitive
Sex object	Sexually aggressive
Attractive because of physical appearance	Attractive because of achievement

Source : John J. Macionis in his "Sociology" 10th Edition, 2006, Page : 331.

essarily go with the biological fact of sex. These traits are not inborn. These differences in the qualities are a cultural creation and a matter of cultural definition. The three New Guinea tribes which she has studied reveal three different types of 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities depending upon their cultural requirements.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. PATRIARCHY AND MATRIARCHY

Gender differences are widely recognized. Conceptions of gender that is of 'males' and 'females' also differ significantly. In spite of a very wide appeal for gender equality, we find some degree of male dominance in some places and female influence in some other areas. This is manifested through what we call 'patriarchy' and 'matriarchy'.

#### Meaning of Patriarchy

Patriarchy literally means "*rule by fathers*". The term 'Patriarchy' is derived from the Greek word 'patria' meaning 'father', and "arche" meaning 'rule'. Thus, patriarchy means "*father-rule*"

- 'Patriarchy' represents "a form of social organisation in which males dominate females".<sup>2</sup>
- In general usage, patriarchy represents a family in which father is the head.

It is true that some men are far more advantaged than others; but in general, males have greater social resources than females. **MacIver** and **Page** have pointed out that "*the growth of the property, development of*

1. Some More Details of Margaret Mead's Study : Mead's argument is only this : If gender reflects biological facts of sex, then, people everywhere should define 'feminine' and 'masculine' in the same way; if gender is cultural, then these conceptions should vary. Her study has proved that gender is only cultural.

- (i) Mead has found that the Arapesh, the mountain dwellers of New Guinea are gentle, mild, maternal and affectionate. Both men and women act in a fashion which we would call 'feminine'.
  - (ii) The Mundugumor, tribals of New Guinea are cannibalistic. Both men and women act in ways which we would call predominantly "masculine". Both are expected to be violent, competitive, aggressively sexed, jealous and rough. Here, every man is pitted against every other, including his brothers and father. Their world is charged with hostility and conflict.
  - (iii) But in the Tchambuli tribe, male and female roles are defined in a way that is quite contrary to our modern way. Here women are more dominant than men. Men gossip, wear curls, and go shopping, are emotionally dependent upon, and less responsible than women. Their men live chiefly for art. Women manage and do major tasks of the family.
2. J.J. Macionis in "*Sociology*" - Page : 328.

*agriculture, concentration of authority and the specialisation of function..."* rendered support to the patriarchal system. The patriarchal system including patriarchal families prevailed among the ancient **Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, the Aryans** of India and so on. In such families, father exercised unlimited authority. He even exerted dictatorial power. [See Page No.54 for the Table.]

## Is Patriarchy Inevitable Today ?

There was a time when comparatively patriarchy was more relevant. In pre-industrial societies, women had little say over pregnancy and child-birth. At the same time, men's greater height and physical strength were highly valued qualities. But in industrialised societies, modern technology has not only provided *control over birth* but also different choices for the people about *how to live*. In today's post-industrial societies, biological differences between men and women virtually offer no justification for patriarchy.

It is true that male dominance still remains even in America, one of the most advanced nations of the world. This fact again raises the question "*is patriarchy inevitable ?*" Some researchers argue that biological differences such as hormonal differences lead to the development of "*different motivations and behaviours - especially aggressiveness in males.*" This makes patriarchy possible, and even impossible to eliminate. Most Sociologists, however, have ruled out this argument and said "*that gender is a social construct that can be changed. Just because no society has yet eliminated patriarchy does not mean that we must remain prisoners of the past.*"<sup>1</sup>

## Meaning of Matriarchy

- *Matriarchy is "a form of social organisation in which females dominate males."*<sup>2</sup>
- *In general usage, matriarchy refers to a family headed by the mother.*

The term "matriarchy" is derived from the Latin word 'mater' which means "mother" and the Greek word 'arche' which means "to rule". Matriarchy literally means "mother-rule". Anthropologists like Lewis Morgan, Briffault, J.J. Bachofen and others believed that matriarchy did exist in the past in one form or the other. They also argued that it was the earliest form of family and also of society. According to them, it existed prior to patriarchy. *Greater ability of women to look after family, women's*

1. J.J. Macionis, Page : 330.

2. J.J. Macionis in 'Sociology' - Page : 328.

*attachment and commitment to children, non-committal attitude of men towards women and children, etc., must have contributed to its prevalence.*

Thus, it can be said that "matriarchy is a social system organised around the principle of mother-rule."<sup>1</sup> Matriarchy is a type of family or society in which authority is held by females, through whom descent and inheritance are traced. Generally, matriarchy could be referred to as a society dominated by women. It is a form of society in which power is with the women and especially with the mothers of a community.

### Existence of Matriarchy - A Myth

It is now firmly believed that neither "matriarchy" [or matriarchate] nor "gynocracy" [which means the rule of females] ever existed anywhere in the past. "Despite the attractiveness of this speculation for feminist theory there is no accredited evidence from either archaeology or anthropology for the existence of matriarchy.. at any time in history or in any human society."<sup>2</sup>

According to MacIver, "there are grave doubts whether such a system ever existed in primitive society."<sup>3</sup> As he points out, the 'mother-dominated family' should be called "maternal family" and not matriarchal family. Since the "mother" is a family status, it applies primarily to family systems. But in tribal societies where the family and society are one and the same, it can apply to the power-structure at that level as well.

### Existence of Absolute Patriarchy is Also a Myth ?

John J. Macionis also opines that there is no clear case of matriarchy anywhere in the world. However, he is of the opinion that the existence of absolute patriarchy is also a myth. As he states, "women's power can rival that of men. During the 1700s and 1800s among the Seneca of North America, for example, women did the farming and controlled the food supply. Therefore, men had to obtain women's support for their objectives, say, to undertake military campaign, or women could simply withhold the necessary food."<sup>4</sup> Another example of matriarchy is the community of the Greek islanders of Lesbos who lived in 600 B.C.

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1. "The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology" - 2005 - Page : 169.
  2. Gordon Marshall in "Oxford Dictionary of Sociology" - Page : 402.
  3. MacIver and Page in "Society", Page : 247.
  4. Source : J.J. Macionis "Sociology" - 2006, Page: 328.

Whether it existed in the past or not, matriarchy is associated with "matrilineality" and "matrilocality" - which represent two characteristics of mother-centred or 'maternal family'. *Matrilineality* refers to a system in which the descent of a new born baby is traced through the mother's line. *Matrilocality* refers to a system of family residence in which the wife does not go out of her parental family but continues to stay with them, especially with the mother. The husband only pays occasional visits as a "privileged visitor" where his own children are being brought up. He has only a secondary position in the home of his own children.

### ● Communities Practising Such Maternal Families

Eskimos, Malay Islanders, Odama Indians, Labrador Indians, Trobriand Islanders, the American Iroquois, the Khasi tribals of India and others. It was prevalent among the Nairs of Kerala and the Bunts of Dakshina Kannada district [Karnataka] for a very long time.

## 4. GENDER ROLES AND ATTRIBUTES

Gender shapes human feelings, thoughts, and actions from birth until death. It affects how we think of ourselves and teaches how to act in normative ways. Every society has its own common beliefs regarding the ways in which individuals of each sex should behave. The ways in which these individuals behave appropriate to their sex as per social expectations, constitute what we call 'sex role' or 'gender role.'<sup>1</sup>

- "Gender roles or sex roles are attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex." - J.J. Macionis
- "Sex roles [gender roles] prescribe the different ways men and women are supposed to act and the different tasks they are expected to undertake." - Gordon Marshall in "Oxford Dictionary of Sociology".

*Gender attributes refer to the set of qualities that are associated with the gender roles.* Individuals of each gender are supposed to have some qualities which even influence the nature of tasks which they undertake. *For example, in the western society, culture defines men as courageous, competitive, less emotional, enterprising; and women as tender, sympathetic, more emotional, less enterprising and quick to show their feelings*

1. Please note that the terms 'sex role' and "gender role" are often used by some sociologists to mean one and the same.

Table No. 2

**THE DIVISION OF LABOUR BY SEX :**  
**A CROSS - CULTURAL COMPARISON**

Activity	Number of Societies in Which Activity is Performed By :				
	Men Always	Men Usually	Either Sex Equally	Women Usually	Women Always
Pursuing sea mammals	34	1	0	0	0
Hunting	166	13	0	0	0
Trapping small animals	128	13	4	1	2
Herding	38	8	4	0	5
Fishing	98	34	19	3	4
Clearing land for agriculture	73	22	17	5	13
Dairy operations	17	4	3	1	13
Preparing and planting saplings	31	23	33	20	37
Erecting and dismantling shelter	14	2	5	6	22
Tending fowl and small animals	21	4	8	1	39
Tending and harvesting crops	10	15	35	39	44
Gathering shellfish	9	4	8	7	35
Making and tending fire	18	6	25	22	62
Bearing burdens	12	6	35	20	57
Preparing drinks and narcotics	20	1	13	8	57
Gathering fruits, berries and nuts	12	3	15	13	63
Gathering fuel	22	1	10	19	89
Preserving meat and fish	8	2	10	14	74
Gathering herbs, roots, seeds, etc.	8	1	11	7	74
Cooking	5	1	9	28	158
Carrying water	7	0	5	7	119
Grinding grain	2	4	5	13	114

*Ref : George P. Murdock's Study of "Comparative Data on the Division of Labour by Sex" - as quoted by Ian Robertson in his "Sociology". Page : 293.*  
*The data in this table is from a survey of 224 traditional pre-industrial societies.*

effort or great hardwork and for women to be responsible for tasks that can be performed near the home.

The table also shows that "as societies evolve from hunting and gathering to agrarian production and the demands of pregnancy and child-

rearing are less limiting, the division of labour by sex becomes more varied, although women tend to specialise in household tasks and men in tasks that take them outside home." <sup>1</sup>

### Women Tend to Work Longer Hours Than Men

Much against the commonly held belief that men work more than women, various studies have convincingly pointed out that women tend to work longer hours than men. In fact, women are over worked.

### Women's Labour is Greater than Men's : Some Facts

- Women, in general make up 51% of the agricultural labour force worldwide.
- In Southeast Asia, women provide up to 90% of the labour force for rice cultivation.
- In Africa, 90% of the work of gathering water and wood for the household, and for food preparation, is done by women.
- In **Andhra Pradesh** [as per the study of Mies - 1986], on an average a woman agricultural labourer during the agricultural season works for about 15 hours a day, whereas her male counterpart works for only 7 to 8 hours <sup>2</sup>
- In **Africa and Asia**, women work about 13 hours more than men, each week.
- A study of the household division of labour in **Bangladesh** villages found that women worked almost 12 hours a day - compared with 8-10 hours a day by men in the same villages.
- In **Pakistan**, 50 percent of rural women cultivate and harvest wheat.
- In many regions, women spend up to 5 hours a day collecting fuel wood and water and up to 5 hours preparing food.
- In the world's least developed countries, 23 percent of rural households are headed by women.

1. William Kornblum in "Sociology in A Changing World" - Page: 328.

2. Another study on time and energy spent by men and women on agricultural work (Batliwala 1982) found that 53 percent of the total human hours per household are contributed by women as compared to 31 percent by men. The remaining contribution comes from children.

## The Impact of Technology

As a result of advances in technology, the greater strength of males becomes less important, and it makes less sense to maintain the earlier divisions of labour. Due to greater progress in technology, *the modern societies have demanded more involvement of women in a broader range of tasks.* This has given rise to a demand that women should not be excluded from access to any roles, including those that are associated with high levels of power and prestige. Due to advancement in technology, the old principle of division of labour on the basis of sex, holds no more valid. Greater educational attainment of women has completely changed the pattern of division of labour. It has minimised gender discrimination in the employment field. Increasing number of women are making use of the modern avenues to enter the employment field to earn money and wealth almost on par with men.

- In America, where there is greater equality of sex, on an average, women do 16.5 hours of house work per week compared with only 9.2 hours by men. Men generally support the idea of women entering the labour force and most count on the money women earn. But many men resist taking on a more equal share of household duties.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. GENDER BIAS

- The concept of 'gender bias' refers to the peoples' pre-conceived notions about the 'gender', that is about the group of 'men' or the group of "women".
- Gender bias, in simple words, denotes partiality and discrimination between men and women.

The concept of 'gender bias' suggests that *women as a group* can be usefully compared against *men as a group* with respect to their standing or position in society. This comparison may suggest that women as a group are not treated in the same way as men are treated and that all women suffer the same injustices while men as a group enjoy the same advantages. It is widely observed that women as a group experience many different forms of injustice and ill-treatment. In gender bias, *normally*

1. Source : J.J. Macionis in 'Sociology' - Page : 335.

women are subordinated to men. This ill-treatment and injustice often amount to oppression and exploitation.

### Some Areas of Gender Bias

- (i) In most of the cases, only men enjoy ownership rights over the land and are entitled for availing of loan facilities.
- (ii) Women's mobility and interaction are more restricted than those of men.
- (iii) Women's work is undervalued and women are paid less wages even though they often do the same type of work as men.
- (iv) Women are rarely consulted in the decision making process.
- (v) Women's participation in marketing is negligible in comparison with their role in the productive process especially in the rural sector.
- (vi) Women have only a secondary role in patriarchal kinship structure and inheritance structure.

***Gender Bias Haunting even at the Stage of Learning :*** It is unfortunate that even the school children are made to develop gender bias sometimes directly and some other times, indirectly. Example, (i) children are told stories that glorify the achievements, heroism, etc. of men and very rarely of women. (ii) School textbooks often consist of pictures and explanations which depict women cooking, serving food, cleaning the house, nursing the babies, cleaning vessels, fetching water, milking cows and so on. Gender bias created in this manner may tend to make students to rate women teachers lower than men teachers. Similarly, adult men with such type of bias may underrate the efficiency of women doctors, women managers, women bureaucrats, women advocates, and so on.

## 7. GENDER STEREOTYPES

***Gender Stereotypes<sup>1</sup>*** also play an important role in our social life because they form the basis of gender bias or prejudice which in turn is used to justify discriminatory treatment given to women.

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1. **Stereotype** : The very word, "stereotype" is "borrowed from the printing process in which one impression is used to stamp out many exact copies." - "*The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*" - Page : 282.

## Meaning of Stereotype

- The concept of *stereotype* refers to "a set of biased generalizations about a group or category of people that is unfavourable, exaggerated and oversimplified."<sup>1</sup>

Stereotypes are often used to brand some category of people as dull, dirty, dishonest, fundamentalist, or to glorify some other category of people as intelligent, enterprising, promising, liberal, accommodative, and so on. What is important here is that the act of 'branding' or 'labelling' is rarely supported by adequate evidences. In fact, there is no attempt to furnish facts to substantiate the stereotypes.

In human history, stereotyped beliefs have been used on several occasions by some group or the other to rationalise the enslavement and persecution of people considered inferior. *Examples* : (i) Europeans who settled in America claimed superiority over the American Indians to justify their expansion into the new world. (ii) The leaders of the Nazi Germany during Hitler's regime, preached that Germans belonged to the "*superior Aryan race*" and the Jews and other non-Aryan people were inferior.

## Stereotypes Often Lead to Discrimination

The group that uses stereotypes normally claims superiority over the groups against which stereotypes are used. This claim of superiority which is rarely supported by evidences, makes one group discriminate against another. In the above mentioned examples, European settlers in America discriminated against the natives and organised a 'purge' against them. Similarly, the Nazis under Hitler's leadership arranged a mass murder of the Hebrews who were the victims of their stereotypes.

- *Stereotypes are not just the things of past.* They do exist at present in different fields in different ways. *Examples* : (i) The belief that government servants are lazy, indifferent and corrupt is a stereotype. (ii) Similarly, the belief that men cannot take care of little children, is also a stereotype. (iii) The belief that whites are intelligent, and Negroes are dirty and dullards, is a stereotype. In stereotypes, there is a tendency to

1. William P. Scott in "Dictionary of Sociology" - Page : 42.

categorise people and to generalise, often beyond the facts, about the characteristics of the members of the category. It is important to be aware of the fact that stereotypes can be positive as well as negative. *Example* : It is held that religions of Indian origin, are liberal and tolerant, while religion that came to India from outside, are rigid and intolerant.

### Women as Victims of Gender Stereotypes

Despite their positive side, stereotypes are more often used to make people develop prejudices about some category of individuals. They are regarded as undesirable because of the prominent role they play in social oppression based on the elements such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, etc.

Stereotyped views are formed about women in a negative sense affecting very badly their self-image. *For example*, some of the prevalent stereotypes such as - *women are less intelligent, more sentimental, lack decision-making ability, have lower self-esteem, more narrowminded and selfish, etc.* - have very badly affected the balanced growth of the personality of women.

Stereotypes encourage a particular way of thinking which may have adverse effects on personality growth. *Examples* : (i) Most advertisements show women cooking food and serving meals to family members, and very rarely men are shown as doing these things. (ii) Magazine photographs and advertisements show teenage girls engaged in applying make-up, brushing their hair and generally worrying about their appearance, but teenage boys are rarely shown doing these things. Such advertisements present a stereotyped picture of women which adversely affect the self-image of those who are continuously exposed to them. What is more dangerous in respect of gender stereotypes is that, it normally leads to gender discrimination. Women may be denied their rights, opportunities, choices, preferences, privileges, pride, etc., for they are very often branded as 'inferior', 'incapable', 'not serious', lacking responsibility', and so on.

Studies conducted by sociologists, psychologists and biologists have made it most of the times abundantly clear that such stereotypes are either overexaggerated, or oversimplified presentations, or they are against facts.

## 8. GENDER SENSITIZATION

- ‘Gender sensitisation’ refers to the task of creating proper consciousness among men and women about what can be called a truly “democratic gender order”.

Gender sensitisation, in brief, refers to the *democratic reconstruction of gender*. It includes an attempt to create awareness among people that men and women are equal in sociocultural and political terms even though biological differences do exist between them. Due changes are to be brought about in the approach of social institutions like the family, religion, and particularly education, so that they do not reproduce or create inequalities between men and women in the society.

The role of the school is very vital in promoting gender equity. Teachers can emphasize on ‘appropriate’ attitudes, behaviours, or choices for boys and girls. The non-governmental organisations [NGOs] may also foster the process of democratic reconstruction of gender. It is wrong to presume that only the feminists and the governmental machinery must strive to end all forms of oppression. On the contrary, it is the moral obligation of all to fight injustice and uphold individual dignity.

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MATERNAL FAMILY AND PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

#### Maternal Family [Mother-Centred Family]

##### Characteristics

1. Matrilineal in Descent. Inheritance, Succession go along the female line.
2. Matrilocal in Residence. Members reside in mother's house.
3. Mother's Agent, i.e., her brother or father exercises authority on her behalf.

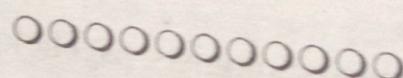
Example of Communities : Omaha Indians, Labrador Indians, Trobriand Islanders, Eskimos, Khasi.

#### Patriarchal Family [Father-Centred Family]

##### Characteristics

1. Patrilineal in Descent. Inheritance, Succession go along the male line.
2. Patrilocal in Residence. Members reside in father's house.
3. Patriarch or father exercises absolute authority.

Examples : Ancient Hebrews, Romans, Greeks, Chinese and Aryans of India practised it.



## UNIT II

# WOMEN'S STATUS IN INDIA

- **IMPORTANT INDICATORS OF WOMEN'S STATUS**

- Sex Ratio
- Education
- Health and Nutrition
- Maternal and Infant Mortality Rate
- Work Participation Rate
- Political Participation of Women

*'Status' refers to the relative standing or position of an individual in a particular social system at a particular time.* The position of men and women is not the same, and has not been the same anywhere at any time in the past. And in no single society the status of men and women has remained the same without being changed throughout history. On the contrary, it has been undergoing change. This holds true in the case of Indian society also.

The decades after independence have seen tremendous changes in the status and position of women in the Indian society. There is no doubt that a major change has taken place in their status from a position of utter degradation in the 18th century to a position of relative equality in the 21st century. The task of measuring or assessing the status of women in the Indian society is a complicated one for we don't have proper measuring rods. The present day status of Indian women is far better than what it was 50 years ago. We cannot however, say with equal confidence that their status is equal to the status of women of the Western countries, nor can we say, that it is definitely equal to the status of the present day men in our country.

Status of the community of women in India is a matter of great concern for many for they constitute the second largest group in the world next only to China. Women in India have made some advances in the fields of education and economy. Despite these advances they find it difficult to come out of the hold of oppressive traditions. They are yet to attain a self-identity, and lack confidence and courage. Hence, their exploitation and violence against them continue to exist.

The position of women belonging to the weaker sections such as SCs and STs, is still worse. Most of them are in the rural areas, that too in the unorganised sector where education, health and productive resources are

extremely inadequate. They do not have equal access to healthcare, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment, social security, medical assistance and so on. Therefore, they remain largely poor and marginalised.

India still continues to be a male dominated society. Family and society at large consider women as second class citizens. Preference of son to daughter fosters the practices of foeticide and female infanticide. These practices have affected male-female ratio. Families are dictated by customs and most of the marriages are arranged by parents. Love marriages are not encouraged even in urban areas. Women do not have the required liberty to join the professions of their liking. Some are not even permitted to take up jobs. Violence against women continues in different forms. In spite of the prevailing legislation to prohibit child marriages, the practice of child marriage flourishes especially in the rural areas. Dowry harassment is almost a daily news even in cities. Equal political rights conceded to women also has not helped them to improve their status. It is with this realistic background one has to make a study of the status of women in India.

'Status of women in India' - has to be understood in relative or comparative terms. An overall observation reveals that there is improvement in their status. But an objective assessment of the same is impossible without seeking the help of some indices or indicators of status. These indicators would help us to assess the status of women in specific terms. Of the various indicators that are used in this respect the importance of the following may be considered here : *sex ratio, education, health and nutrition, maternal and infant mortality rates, work participation rate, political participation, etc.*

## SOME IMPORTANT INDICATORS OF WOMEN'S STATUS

### 1. SEX RATIO

**"Sex ratio"** refers to the number of females for every 1000 males. Sex ratio is one of the important factors that affect and influence various areas of social life. Wide gap in the male-female ratio adversely affects marriage and family systems, sex morals and behavioural aspects, education and economy, work culture and occupational structure, and so on.

- **Declining Ratio of Females to Males in India :** Normally, in the population of any country, male-female ratio remains more or less the same, that is, 50:50. In India, as the census reports reveal female population has

Table No. 1

SEX RATIO IN INDIA		
Year	Females per 1000	Males
1901	972	
1911	964	
1921	955	
1931	950	
1941	945	
1951	946	
1961	941	
1971	930	
1981	934	
1991	927	
2001	933	

**Source : National Family Health Services - 2, India 1998-99**

### Some Facts About the “Declining Sex”

- (i) It is said that in India, out of 12 million female children born every year, around 25% of them die before they attain the age of 15.
- (ii) Of the children which die every year, about 3 lakh female children, that is, more than the number of male children, die for one or the other reason.
- (iii) Of the children which die every year in India, the 6th child dies due to gender discrimination.<sup>1</sup>
- (iv) Women now constitute 48.1% of the total population in India.

### ● Causes for the Decline of the Females in the Sex Ratio

Compared with the developed nations, the female sex ratio in the Indian context is very less. In America, for example, the situation is reverse. As per the year 2000 estimate, in U.S.A., there are 960 males for every 1000 females. There is a shortage of 40 males for 1000 females.

The following are some of the factors contributing to the decline of the females in India.

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1. Source of Statistics : Dr. R. Indira in "Mahile - Samaja Mattu Samskriti" - Page : 93.

- (i) *Traditional importance given to male children* due to the impact of the prevalent patriarchal values. Examples : Only the son is empowered to do some religious rites, only he can perform his parental last rites during cremation, the belief that only son is helpful during old age, etc.
- (ii) *Practice of female infanticide* among some tribals and also some lower caste people in some areas.
- (iii) *Medical termination of the "unwanted female"* children at the stage of foetus itself due to the abuse of technology in the form of ultrasound machines.
- (iv) *Female children are considered a burden* and a big liability on whom parents have to spend huge amount as 'dowry' for getting them married. Amount spent on girls is treated as a 'waste' for the parental family for she is going out of the family to join her husband after her marriage.
- (v) *Higher maternal mortality rate [MMR]* is another cause for the decline in the number of women. From a global perspective, India accounts for 19% of all livebirths and 27% of all maternal deaths. The MMR in India at about 410 per 1 lakh live births, is more than 50 times higher than the rates that exist in the developed countries. This is more so in the rural areas where more than 70% child births are taking place in the homes where proper medical facilities are not available.

### ● Impact of This Imbalance on the Sex Ratio

Strong male preference and avoidance of female children will have its own adverse consequences. This will affect future marriage patterns and fertility patterns. It may even lead to unrest among young male adults for they will be unable to find partners.

## 2. EDUCATION AS AN INDICATOR OF SOCIAL STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN

Education is one of the basic activities of people in all human societies. In all modern societies education has become the most important criterion of assessing the social status of the individuals. In such societies, the educational system provides people with qualifications and aspirations to meet society's occupational needs. The upward mobility of the people and their relative success or failure in it depends much on their educational qualifications. Occupations that help social mobility require certain educational eligibility. It is in this context, *education acquires significance not only as a promoter of social mobility but also as an indicator of social status.*

In the Indian society, though education has been given importance traditionally, for various historical reasons, it has remained backward

educationally. Due to the total denial of educational facilities for the Indian women especially during the medieval period and a little earlier, women in India remained uneducated for centuries. Though things started improving especially after independence, factors such as poverty, over population, unemployment, ignorance, parental negligence, lack of social consciousness, etc., have adversely affected their education. Status of Indian women remained very low due to their low level of education.

The educational level of the people has no doubt started improving especially after independence, but this improvement is not uniform. Only a few sections and a few areas are showing improvement but the vast majority is lagging behind. Women who constitute around 50% of the population have been neglected educationally for a long time. That is why their literacy level remained very low, as low as just **54.16%** in 2001, whereas the world average is around **78%**. Because of their poor literacy, Indian women are not able to enter the income-fetching sectors in large numbers as employees. For example, in 2001, only **25.7%** of our women are found in that category whereas the world average for the same is **58%**.

### The Changing Educational Scenario

Education is the great elevator of social status. It is for this reason, most of the social reformers laid emphasis on the education of women. During the recent years, that is, especially after 1970s, there is an awakening among Indian women regarding their education. The Central and State Governments also started showing concern in promoting the educational interests of women. Those women who were fortunate enough to avail of the new educational opportunities also proved their efficiency by outsmarting men in terms of their performance in college and university examinations. Fortunately this trend continues with relatively greater enthusiasm and vigour even today. Women have started joining the prestigious professional courses such as - engineering, medical, MBA, MCA, MSW, M.Sc, M.A., M.Com., C.A., etc. Their qualitative performances are also impressive and promising. Women with such high educational background are bound to secure a respectable status in the society.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Some Recent Statistics Revealing Educational Excellence of Women* : As per the latest information, 1.25 lakh women graduate as doctors every year this is 50% of the total number. Further, 21% of India's software professionals and 25% of science and engineering graduates are women. More than 50% of the students who pass out every year with a bachelor's degree in humanities are girls. *Source of these Vital Statistics* : "India Today", April 4, 2005, Page : 32.

By their impressive educational performances, women are becoming IAS, IFS and IPS officers. [*Indian administrative Service, Indian Foreign Service and Indian Police Service*]. In 1987, there were 339 women IAS officers out of a total of 4548 posts. From 1972 to 1992, 53 women joined the IPS. The percentage of women IPS officers is however very low [0.86%] compared to the IAS and IFS.

By 1993, out of 409 IFS officers, 40 were women. In the judiciary, in 2005, there were 19 women judges out of a 'sanctioned strength of 647 judges in 21 high courts.

**Fathima Bibi**, of Kerala became the first woman judge in the Supreme Court. **Kiran Bedi** [IPS], as Inspector General of Prisons of Tihar Jail [New Delhi] and **Kanchan C. Bhattacharya** [IPS] as Deputy General of Police Posted at Uttaranchal have shown impressive performances. **Malathi Das** [IAS] of Udupi has very recently [October 2006] assumed office as the Chief Secretary to the Government of Karnataka.

### 3. HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The term "**health**", in general, refers to "*bodily health*" or "*sound bodily condition*". The word **nutrition** refers to the *habit of consuming energising food* that is helpful in keeping bodily organs in a healthy condition. General health condition of women is one of the social indicators of women's status. Women in India are in a disadvantageous position as far as the availing of health services are concerned. Due to male preference, women's health is usually neglected and they are not supplied with the minimum required nutritious food. The following health indicators reveal to what extent health and nutrition of Indian women are neglected.

1. *The average life expectancy of women* at birth in India is less than that of the women of the developing and developed countries. In 2000, it stood at 63.8 years for Indian women, whereas in the case of women of Sri Lanka it was 75.3 years, Thailand 73.2 years, Japan 84.4 years, USA 79.9 years, and U.K. 80.2 years, and so on. [See Table No. 2]
2. *Infant mortality rate [IMR]* per 1000 livebirth is 73 in India whereas it is only 17 in Sri Lanka, and 66 in the developing world, and the world average is only 60.
3. *Maternal mortality rate [MMR]* per 1 lakh livebirths is 570 in India, whereas it is only 140 in Sri Lanka, 470 in the developing world, and its world average is 430.
4. Of the babies that are born in India, 33% are underweight babies, whereas it is only 17% at the level of developing countries and 7% at the whole world level.

5. As far as the use of contraceptives are concerned, only 44% of the Indians are using them, whereas the percentage stands at 66 for Sri Lanka, and 54 for the developing world.
6. On an average, per day, women in India consume food, that is, about 1000 calories less than what men consume.
7. More than 40-50% women in urban areas and 50-70% in rural areas are suffering from anaemia due to the shortage of nutritious food.
8. Number of women who seek public medical help is only 1/3 of the number of men who avail of the health services.
9. Majority of women's health is further harmed by air and water pollution and lack of sanitation. Even inside the house also women while cooking are exposed to smoke coming out of biomass and kerosene stoves which impairs their health very badly.
10. A large number of women are becoming the victims of HIV / AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

#### 4. INFANT MORTALITY RATE [IMR] AND MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE [MMR]

- *Infant mortality rate [IMR] refers to the number of deaths among infants under one year of age for 1000 live births in a given year.*
- *Maternal mortality rate [MMR] refers to the number of death of mothers for 1000 live births in a given year in a country's population].*

Infant mortality and maternal mortality represent two sensitive indicators of human development. Unfortunately, in India, the incidences of both are comparatively high.

Table No. 2

#### EXPECTATION OF LIFE AT BIRTH IN SELECTED COUNTRIES 2000

Developing Countries	2000		Developed Countries	2000	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
Nepal	58.8	58.3	UK	75.2	80.2
Bangladesh	59.4	59.5	USA	74.1	79.9
Myanmar	53.7	58.5	Sweeden	77.2	82.2
India	62.8	63.8	Switzerland	75.6	82.0
SriLanka	69.5	75.3	Russian Federation	61.0	73.0
Thailand	67.3	73.2	Japan	77.4	84.4

Source : U.N. Human Development Report 2002 as quoted by K. Park in  
"Preventive and Social Medicine" [2003] Page : 331.

India's maternal mortality rates are among the world's highest. From a global perspective, India accounts for 19% of all live births and 27% of all maternal deaths that take place at the world level.

**Chatterjee** [1970] estimates that deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by over 300,000 each year; out of this, every 6th infant death is specifically due to gender disparity. Of the 12 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25% will not live to see their 15th birthday.

A study in rural **Punjab** revealed that between the ages of 1 and 23 months, female mortality rates are nearly twice those of males. Girls born to mothers who already have one or more surviving daughters, experience 53% higher mortality. The maternal mortality rate in India at about 410 per 100,000 births, is more than 50 times higher than the rates that exist in the developed countries. According to some estimates, around **5 million** abortions are performed annually in India, with a large majority being illegal. Abortion related mortality is high due to this reason.

### Causes for the Relative High MMR

Reluctance to seek medical care for pregnancy is one of the strong reasons for high MMR in India. Many women consider it as a temporary phase which will disappear on its own and hence do not seek medical help. Nationwide studies reveal that only **40-50%** of women receive any antenatal care.

Registered reports reveal that in states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Orissa, U.P., Maharashtra and Gujarat hardly 5 to 22% of women in the rural areas and 21 to 51% of them in the urban areas obtain maternal and child health services.

A woman who has already faced difficulties in the first or previous pregnancies is not seeking hospital service but usually treated with home remedies for three reasons :

- she has to obtain the permission of the mother - in - law and husband for the same;
- financial considerations;
- fear that the treatment may be more harmful than the malady.

It is estimated that pregnancy - related deaths account for nearly **25%** of the total number of deaths among women aged between 15 and 29 years. It is also assessed that out of these 25% deaths more than 2/3 are considered preventable.

## 5. WOMEN'S WORK PARTICIPATION RATE

*Women's work participation rate* refers to the rate of participation of women in the economically productive and useful activities. In simple, it refers to the rate of employment of women as against that of men. Women's participation in total workforce was 32% in 1901, and it increased to 22.7% in 1991 and to 25.7% in 2001. Women have been contributing greatly to the economy though it is not properly recognised. Women are pioneers in certain tasks such as - gathering fruits, nuts, berries, food preparation, carrying water, bearing burden, gathering fuel, preserving meat, fish, etc. Today, they are working in different sectors of the economy - as agricultural and industrial labourers, road and building construction workers, domestic helpers, crafts women, self-employed women, doctors, engineers, clerks, teachers and white collared executives.

**Increased Participation of Women in Workforce :** Women's work participation or employment of women is an important indicator of women's status. In most of the Western countries, more than 50% of the women are found to be in labour force today. **For example**, in USA in 1900, around 20% of women were found in the labour force and that percentage increased to 60 in 2002. Of these working women, 3/4 of them worked full time.<sup>1</sup> In certain categories of occupations in U.S.A., we find absolute dominance of women, i.e., more than 90%. [See Table No. 3] For example, most of the child-care providers, dental hygienists, receptionists, stenographers,

Table No. 3

### JOB WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF WOMEN, IN USA 2002

S.No.	Occupations	Number of Women Employed	Percentage in Occupation Who Are Women
1.	Family child-care provider	457,000	99.4
2.	Secretary	2,302,000	98.6
3.	Dental hygienist	133,000	98.1
4.	Dental assistant	224,000	98.0
5.	Prekindergarten teacher	647,000	97.7
6.	Private household child-care worker	229,000	97.6
7.	Receptionist	1,068,000	97.1
8.	Stenographer	146,000	95.2
9.	Licensed practical nurse	382,000	94.9
10.	Speech therapist	117,000	94.3

Source : John J. Macionis in his "Sociology" 10th Edition, [2006] Page : 333.

1. John J. Macionis in 'Sociology' - 2006, Page : 332.

nurses, speech therapists, secretaries, pre-K.G. and K.G. teachers, etc., are found to be women.

*In the Indian context*, the issue of work participation of women has many dimensions. In the economic field, the situation is such that majority of women who are ready to work are not finding suitable work to their satisfaction. Those who are in the employment sector are becoming the objects of *exploitation and harassment*. Though an increase in the female literacy level and extension of employment opportunities for women in the non-agricultural sector have added to the trend in favour of female employment, these two problems continue to exist.

*The Extent of Women's Participation in Jobs* : It is estimated that nearly 1/3 of our total labour force [32%] consists of women. Working women constitute only 16.43% of the total female population of the country. As per 2000 estimate, the number of working women in organised public and private sectors, was around 49.23 lakhs representing a growth rate of more than 5% over the previous decade [See Table No. 4]. The percentage increase of working women during the last decade was more than that of male workers. The main problem for these female workers, is that they are harassed in workplace in different ways. Not only the rights of working women are violated, they are often sexually harassed.

*Non-recognition of Women's Work* : Though women in India [and also in many other Asian and African Countries] work for longer hours, their work is hardly recognised in public. Survey studies have revealed that many men have the impression that "women like children, eat and do nothing". This impression is largely due to the fact that most of women's time is

**EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN ORGANIZED PUBLIC** Table No. 4  
**AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN INDIA UPTO 2000 [IN LAKHS]**

Year	PUBLIC SECTOR		PRIVATE SECTOR		TOTAL	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1971	98.70	8.60	56.80	10.80	155.50	19.30
1981	139.80	14.90	61.00	12.90	200.50	27.93
1991	167.10	23.40	62.40	14.30	229.50	37.81
1997	168.66	27.28	67.77	19.09	236.08	46.37
1999	166.04	52.11	66.80	20.18	232.84	48.29
2000	164.57	28.57	65.80	20.66	230.37	49.23

Source : Neeta Anand in "Status of Women in Modern India"  
Edited by B.B. Verma, [2005] Page : 138.

spent in the "non-wage economic tasks". This has created a social misperception that women's work has no economic value. Much against this, in parts of East Africa, for example, women work up to 16 hours a day in the home and grow 66 to 80% of the family's food without getting due recognition for their work.

### ● Women's Work is Rarely Recognised, Though They Work for More Hours Than Their Men

Many hold the view that women's economic dependence on men itself reveals that they do less work. This view is baseless and against the facts. Women's work at home is largely invisible; and more often it is regarded as unproductive. "*If all activities — including maintenance of kitchen gardens and poultry, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood, etc. — are taken into account, then 88 percent of rural housewives and 66 percent of urban housewives can be considered as economically productive.*"

Facts reveal that women work roughly twice as many hours as men. This is especially so in an agriculture dominated society where women's contribution to agriculture is very great. "*The extent of women's contribution is aptly highlighted by a micro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas which found that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks works 1,064 hours, a man 1,212 hours and a woman 3,485 hours in a year.*"

TYPICAL PICTURE OF COMPARATIVE SHARE OF BURDEN IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR Table No. 5

S.No.	Activity / Chores	Man %	Woman %
1.	Feeding the family	05	95
2.	Ploughing fields	95	05
3.	Animal Husbandry	50	50
4.	Fuel, fodder and water	10	90
5.	Harvesting	40	60
6.	Agro Processing	10	90
7.	Storage	20	80
8.	Transporting	20	80
9.	Weeding	30	70
10.	Sowing/ Transplanting	50	50
11.	Marketing	70	30
12.	Preparation of Field	95	05
	Total Workload	40	60

Source : Seema Singh in "Status of Women in Modern India",  
Edited by S.B. Verma - Page : 84.

## **Women Share a Greater Burden of Workload**

Women normally work more though they are not making it public. According to one estimate made in 1995, 78% of the women in the countryside engage in agricultural activities. In the total workload involved in agriculture, women's share of burden is found to be 60%, whereas it is only 40% in the case of men. [See Table no. 5]

## **6. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN**

*Political participation of women refers to the active participation of women in political activities, political parties, political processes including voting.* Participation of women in politics and public life is very low in India. We find only a negligible number of women in prestigious positions like those of Central and State cabinet ministers, governors, secretaries and legal advisers to the governments, ambassadors to other countries, IPS, IAS, IFS officers, judges in courts, mayors of big cities, office bearers of all-India parties, etc. No political party of India has given position to women in proportion to their number in the total population. Women so far have not constituted themselves into a "pressure group". In our political life, we have caste lobbies, linguistic lobbies, capitalist lobbies, minority lobby, etc. but we do not have "women lobby" to bring pressure on the government.

### **Minimum Representation of Women in Lok Sabha**

The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has been very poor since 1952 elections itself. [See Table no. 6] For example, in 1952, there were 22 women Parliamentarians constituting only 4.4%, that is, out of a total of 499. In the 12th Lok Sabha, [1998] their number increased only to 43, that is out of the total strength of 543. In no previous elections, women's representation in the Parliament had exceeded this mark of [8.9%]. This means women who

Table No. 6  
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN'S  
REPRESENTATION IN THE  
LOK SABHA AND RAJYA SABHA  
IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

Period	Lok Sabha	Rajya Sabha
1952	4.4	7.3
1957	5.4	7.5
1962	6.8	7.6
1967	5.9	8.3
1971	4.2	7.0
1977	3.4	10.2
1980	7.9	9.8
1984	8.1	11.4
1989	5.3	9.7
1991	7.2	15.5
1996	7.2	9.0
1998	8.0	---

From Different Sources

constitute 50% of the total population do not even get 10% of the representation in the Parliament. In the 13th and the present 14th Lok Sabha Elections also representation of women is less than 10%.<sup>1</sup>

*Poor Participation of Women in the Party Politics :* Not only in the legislative bodies but even within the framework of the political parties also the participation of women is very poor. Political parties are still male-dominated and unwilling to give sufficient representation to women. *For example*, in 2001 the Congress Party had only 3 women in its 20-member Working Committee. In the BJP Working Committee, out of 75 members there were only 8 women, and in its 650 member National Council, there were only 150 women. The Communist Party [Marxists] had only 12 women in its 150 member National Council, and 3 women in its 21 member National Executive. At the state and district levels also the picture of this representation is more or less the same. No political party is ready to give representation to women in proportion to their strength in the population.

*Increasing Violence and Terrorism in Politics :* Political corruption, criminalisation of politics, erosion of political values, disappearance of political decency, instability, lawlessness, terrorism and confusion have been increasing in our public life since 1980s. This state of confused political situation has discouraged women from taking active role in politics.

### 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts [1993]

#### Towards Political Empowerment of Women

Empowerment of women without a reasonable participation of women in politics becomes only partial. To assure greater and effective participation of women in politics, it was felt that some percentage of seats should be reserved for them at least at the level of the local bodies. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments assure 33.3% of seats

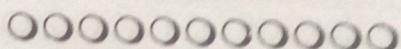
1. It is surprising to note that even in the so called developed countries like the U.K. [6.3%], USA [5.3%], France [6.4%], and Japan [1.4%] the representation of women in the Parliament was very low in 1987. India's percentage they was 8.3. In Muslim countries like Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Indonesia, women had no representation. Women had highest representation in USSR [34.5%] followed by Norway and Rumania [34.4% each], and Finland [31.5%]. Source : The World's women 1970-1990. Trends and Statistics UNNY 1991 - as quoted by Shamim Aleem [Edition] in 'Women's Development, Problems and Prospects' [1996] - Page : 71.

for women [including women belonging to SC and ST] in the *Panchayat Raj Institutions* [which include *Gram Panchayats*, *Thaluk Panchayats* and *Zilla Panchayats*] and also *urban self-governments* [which include *Municipal Corporations*, *Municipalities* and *Cantonment Boards*].

### **Impressive Participation of Women in the Local Bodies**

Though women's participation in politics at higher level, that is, at the provincial and national level, is discouraging, their participation in local politics has created new hopes of women empowerment. The 73rd Constitutional Act, in particular, was a very bold step towards the empowerment of women. Rural women who have been working as farm labourers, cleaning the utensils, washing clothes, sweeping the court-yard, fetching drinking water from a distance, cooking food and serving the same to all, labouring in the fields, etc., - are now able to exercise some amount of political power on par with men. They now have the role to play in matters of decision making that affect village affairs. "*The provisions of Act for the women are in no way less than a revolution.*"<sup>1</sup>

Radical changes are now being witnessed in our political field at least at the lower level because of the political empowerment of women. Around **one million** women have actively entered political life in our country through Panchayat Raj Institutions [PRI]. They have the privilege of representing more than **750 million** people living in more than **6.38 lakh** villages. The creation of the quota system has made the local women occupy seats of political power even though vast majority of them are illiterate and poor. It is observed that since the onset of the PRI, the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen from **4.5%** to **25** to **40%**. Successful participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions has boosted the confidence of many to demand **33.3%** reservation for women in the Parliament.



1. Doshi and Jain in '*Rural Sociology*' - Page : 338.

# UNIT III

## CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ISSUES

1. Discrimination Against Girl Child.
2. Violence Against Women.
3. Problems of Health and Nutrition.
4. Women's Education and Gender Bias in Education.
5. Trafficking in Women.
6. Globalization and Impact on Women.

Fifty years of Indian independence has witnessed many changes in many fields of our national life. From the women's point of view also these changes are significant. Issues and problems which were bothering our women 50 years ago have either disappeared or given place to new ones. Hence, issues relating to the practices of '*sati*', '*devadasi*', *purdah*, *imposition of inhuman restrictions on women*, *child marriage*, etc., have either become insignificant or not found at all. It does not mean that Indian women in the beginning of the 21st century have become totally free from all these unwanted problems and inhuman practices.

Women of India today are faced with new situations, trapped by new problems and encountered with many challenges. Girl children are put to various disadvantages and experience bitter discrimination. Women have become victims of violence both inside the family and outside. Women's health is never considered seriously and is often neglected. Women are denied nutritious food for most of them are not regarded as 'bread winners'. Women's education never assumed priority for it is considered as "wasteful" by a large number of ruralites and urban illiterates. Male prejudices towards female education, particularly higher education still continue to hold its sway. Women are often treated as "sex commodities", and trafficking in women often assumes ugly forms. There are national and international level networks and organisations engaged in the profitable business of the sale of women. Added to all these things, the process of "globalisation", let loose at the fag end of

the 20th century, has brought for women new anxieties, fears and challenges. Unless women are 'determined to fight back with all the power at their command against these forces, they cannot become free from these anxieties.

## 1. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GIRL CHILD

*Discrimination against girl child* reflects the practice of giving preferential treatment and importance to male child over female child. This is also a case of 'gender discrimination'. In comparison with some other social problems, "gender discrimination" does not "appear" to be a serious problem in India. It is so because, it has not been made a very big social issue so far. But in reality, it has weakened not only the strength of the female community of India but also of Indian society in general. Though constitutionally men and women are equal, socially men are given priority and importance sometimes to the disadvantage of women. This disadvantage or discrimination is to be faced by women right from their childhood. In fact, there are many areas in which discrimination against the girl child, in particular, is practised.

- *Some Major Areas of Discrimination Against Girl Child* : The practices of - female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child labour, pushing girl children into bonded labour; sale or trafficking in young girls, abduction of girl children; sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of girl children, girl child prostitution, neglect in respect of providing educational and health facilities, and opportunities of decent life, etc. reflect the discriminatory practices against the girl child.

- *Discrimination in Socialisation* : In our socialisation process, female children are becoming victims of discrimination. In the Indian social context, even today male children are preferred to female children. Male preference and female negligence has almost become a working policy especially in the rural areas. Discrimination between male and female children is made in *matters relating to food, dress, healthcare, education, domestic work, etc.* The policy of male preference and female negligence has led to what are known as "female disadvantages".

- *Continued Craving for Male Child* : In India, due to the predominance of patriarchic values, mothers show preferences for male children. They give them importance because - *males are wanted during their old age to offer protection, males have greater scope than women and occupa-*

tional avenues are also wider for males than for females. Woman especially in North India is made to feel that her image would go down in the circle of relatives if she fails to fetch to her husband's family a male child. Women with only female children are often humiliated and illtreated. Hence, the craving for male children continues even now. This male preference has led to the abuse of advanced technology. The sophisticated scanning and supersonographic equipments are being misused to find out the sex of the child; that is to go for abortion if the child is found to be an "unwanted female child". These medical tests which would cost between Rs. 80/-to 800/- are within the reach of the lower middle class and even the middle-lower class resulting in the killing of the female foetuses in a large number. Between 1978 and 1982, more than 78,000 known cases of foetuses were killed mainly because of these medical tests.<sup>1</sup>

## Areas of Severe Discrimination

According to **Vir Bala Aggarwal**,<sup>2</sup> there are five major areas of severe discrimination against the girl child. They are -

- (i) *Female Foeticide*
- (ii) *Female Infanticide*
- (iii) *Selling of Girl Children*
- (iv) *Girl Child Prostitution, and*
- (v) *Sexual Abuse of Girl Children.*

**(i) Female Foeticide :** This refers to an atrocity against a girl even before she is born. This is the most unfortunate sophisticated way of getting rid of daughters through sex determination tests in which greedy doctors are involved. Though the latest legislation namely, *Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act, 1994*, prohibits such an act, it is carried on secretly. The worrying trend is that this is far stronger in urban areas and among literate women than in the rural areas.

**(ii) Female Infanticide :** This refers to the practice of killing female babies as soon as they are born. It is reported to be currently in existence in parts of Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, U.P., W.Bengal and Tamil Nadu. A few

1. *Source : Times of India*, Editorial June 1982.

2. *Vir Bala Aggarwal* in "*Status of Women in Modern India*" - Edited by S.B. Verma [2005]  
Page : 4-8.

districts of Tamil Nadu have been notorious for this practice. The practice continues to exist even though its magnitude is reduced a little.

(iii) *Selling of Girl Children* : This is the practice of selling girl children for money just as any one sells commodities. There are organisations and agencies doing this work in a secret manner with the co-operation of corrupt government officers, police, border forces, etc. Girls from our nation are being sold mainly to Arab countries and the trade continues even today.

(iv) *Girl Child Prostitution* : The girl child is highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation at home and outside the home. Among the *Jogins* of Andhra, *Basavis* or *Devadasis* of Karnataka; *Bedias*, *Nats* and *Gandharvas* of North India, there is the practice of forcing young girls to resort to prostitution. These child prostitutes are found to be suffering from skin diseases, venereal diseases, T.B., anaemia, AIDS, etc.

(v) *Sexual Abuse of Girl Children* : Girl children often become the victims of sexual abuse. *Sexual abuse refers to the forced involvement of children in sexual activities who are immatured to understand or enjoy sex.* Most of them become the victims of it at about 14 years of age or a little above that age. Around 20% of the girls suffer from it in one way or another. Girl children are abused at home, neighbourhood, school, hospital and such other places. In more than 65% of the cases, they become the victims at the hands of employers, co-workers, tenants, neighbours and acquaintances.

## 2. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Most societies exhibit violence in one way or another. Violence against men or women is a social problem because, a large number of people are affected by it almost everyday. Each of us is affected in countless ways by the climate of violence. Violence disrupts society. Every society creates institutions designed to achieve certain ends. Violence cuts short normal institutional functions. Every act of violence, from assault to armed revolution, detracts to some degree from the authority normally vested in society.

• *Women as Easy Victims of Violence* : Who is most likely to be victimised by violent crime ? Women are less likely to be victimised by violent crime than men, though for some crimes and among some groups of women, victimisation is higher than men. But women become easy victims

of crimes. Violence against women is not a new phenomenon in India. "Women in Indian society have been victims of ill-treatment, humiliation, torture, and exploitation as far as the written records of social organisation and family life are available. These records are replete with incidents of abduction, rape, murder, and torture of women. But, regrettably, female victims of violence have not been given much attention in the literature on social problems or in the literature on criminal violence."<sup>1</sup>

- ***Increasing Crimes Against Women*** : Crime against women is an ever-increasing problem. This problem has been growing more and more acute in India during the recent years. Crimes against women include violence against women, rape, molestation, dowry harassment, wife-battering, kidnapping female children to be sold into brothel homes, forcible embracement, forcible religious conversion, cheating young women with a promise to marry them or fetch them a job, and various types of sexual harassments and abuse of women including eve teasing.

- ***Analysing Facts of Crimes Against Women*** : As per the report [1994] of the "Crime Record Bureau" of the Central Home Ministry,<sup>2</sup> crimes against women increased to a great extent in the year 1993-94. As per this report, in India on an average,

- (i) every day for every 6 minutes one atrocity is committed against women;
- (ii) for every 44 minutes a woman is kidnapped;<sup>3</sup>
- (iii) for every 47 minutes a woman is raped;<sup>4</sup>
- (iv) every day 17 dowry deaths take place.

The same report says that :

- (i) crimes against women increased *two times* in the last 10 years [1984-1994];
- (ii) instances of rape by 400% in the last two decades [1972-1994];
- (iii) instances of kidnapping and blackmailing women by 30% between 1974 and 1993.
- (iv) In 1993 alone, about 82,818 instances of crimes against women were registered. Many cases were not registered. It is said that only 10% of the rape cases are usually reported.

1. Prof. Ram Ahuja in "Violence Against Women" [1998]. Page - 11.

2. Source : Report in "Udayavani" Kannada daily dated 27th Feb - 1994.

3. Kidnapping refers to the illegal act of taking away of a minor without the consent of the lawful guardian.

4. Rape refers to the act of forceful or illicit sex with a woman against her will.

## Some More Facts About Violence Against Women

The details of the reported cases of criminal violence against women can be obtained from the records of three important agencies, namely : (i) *Ministry of Home Affairs*, (ii) *Police Research Bureau*, and (iii) *National Institute of Social Defence*. Crime figures pertaining to 6 types of crimes against women in India in the 5 years between 1990 and 1994 as per the report of these agencies, are constantly increasing every year. During this period, incidences of crimes that took place every year, are mentioned below.

### Incidences of Crimes that Took Place Every Year Between 1990-1994

Eve Teasing	- 10,000	Cases of Dowry Death	- 5,000
Rape Cases	- 11,000	Cases of Torture of Women	- 20,000
Kidnapping of Women	- 12,000	Molestation of Women	- 21,000

### Statistics for the Year 1994 : In the Year 1994 Itself the Following Different Cases were Recorded

Eve Teasing	- 10,496	Dowry Deaths	- 4,935
Rape Cases	- 12,351	Cases of Torture of Women	- 25,946
Kidnapping / Abduction of Women	- 12,998	Molestation of Women	- 24,117

## Violence Against Women Within and Outside Family

In a male dominated society like India, violences against women are unfortunately increasing at an alarming rate. Such violences can be grouped into two types : (a) *violence against women within the family, and (b) violence against women outside the family including the criminal violence*.

(a) *Violence Against Women Within the Family or Domestic Violence* : Women are often subject to violence within the family, a place which is expected to protect their dignity and assure their safety. This type of violence includes crimes such as --- *dowry related harassments including death, wife-battering, marital rape, sexual abuse of female children and women of one's own family, deprivation of sufficient food to female members, committing incestuous offences, inducing female members of the family to resort to sex-trade, female genital mutilation, abusing female servants of the family, and so on.*

**(b) Violence Against Women Outside the Family or Social Violence**

: Kidnapping, raping and murdering women are very serious offences. The society at large itself is to be blamed for many types of violences that are committed against women especially outside the family. Such violences include --- *compelling women for abortion and to undergo tubectomy operation, eve-teasing, kidnapping girls of pre-matured age and forcing them to marry, sexual harassment of women employees in workplace, immoral trafficking in women and girls, forced prostitution, kidnapping and mutilating the organs [such as hands, legs, ears, nose, etc.] of female children to use them for the purpose of begging, resorting to forcible religious conversion of young women, female genital mutilation<sup>1</sup>, blackmailing of women, throwing acid at the faces of girls who refuse to marry, the police and the jail personnel committing sexual crimes against female prisoners, the police, armed forces and the border security forces committing sex crimes against the female citizens in the border areas, and so on.*

### **3. PROBLEMS OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION**

Most of the studies conducted in India have revealed that healthcare of women is neglected and both nutrition and health services are not adopted. Due to gender prejudice proper attention is not given to the needs of women at all stages of the life-cycle. This is one of the reasons for their low status in society.

#### **Poor Supply of Water and Sanitary Facilities**

Millions of houses in India, Africa and many Asian countries are not provided with enough water and sanitary facilities. Provision of good water and sanitation facilities at home helps women more than men in performing routines. Non-availability of proper sanitary facilities would cause serious gynecological problems such as urinary infections and white discharge among women.

**Daily Struggle to Get Drinking Water :** There are lakhs of families for which good drinking water facility is also not provided and women

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1. *Female Genital Mutilation or Female Circumcision*, is known to be performed in more than forty countries around the world, particularly in Africa. The practice is common and affects a majority of girls in the eastern African nations of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. It is said that at the world level at least 100 million women are affected by this cruelty. Source : J.J. Macionis "Sociology" - Page : 340.

are the worst sufferers in these families for they are often made to walk kilometers every day to fetch drinking water. This irritable exercise makes them neglect their health and also of their children for it is believed that more than 30-40% of the ordinary diseases are caused by infected water.

Lack of drinking water facility disturbs the schooling of young girls for they are normally given the task of fetching water from a distant place. In fact, school attendance by girls has risen since the introduction of water points in four communities in Arappalipatti and Panjappatti in Tamil Nadu.

**Female Child is Given Less HealthCare :** Indian women's craving for male children is quite well-known. This craving for male children make them give less attention to female children and even to neglect their health. "The practice of breast-feeding female children for shorter periods of time reflects the strong desire for sons. If women are particularly anxious to have a male child, they may deliberately try to become pregnant again as soon as possible after a female is born. Conversely, women may consciously seek to avoid another pregnancy after the birth of a male child in order to give maximum attention to the new son."

**Women's Health is Ignored :** Women suffer from some distinctive health problems from which men are free. Women have to undergo the distinctive biological processes of pregnancy or child-bearing, delivering, nursing, feeding, child-caring or rearing etc. These are their maternal functions. But the insistence on the family planning has posed many health hazards. The use of contraceptives, copper-T, sterilisation, abortion and hormonal drugs has an adverse effect on health. Those who make use of them suffer from problems such as *bodily weakness, bloodlessness, high bleeding, fatness, problems in uterus, discomfort in breast, chronic back pain*, etc. As Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel have criticised, the advocates of family planning do not seem to bother much about these problems.

- **Women Neglecting their Own Health:** Studies have revealed that our women are neglecting their own health. Normally Indian women consume less food [that is, on an average 1000 calories a day] and spend more energy on work. Women toil for the good of the family and children even at the cost of neglecting their own health. Women very rarely complain about their ill-health because of their virtue of "*self-denial*". The records

in the health centres reveal that women are lagging behind men [that is, 1:3, meaning one woman taking medical help for every 3 men] even in matters of availing of medical help.

### ● Causes for Women's Poor Health

Following factors contribute to the neglect of women's health.

- (i) Women who are made to discharge heavy domestic work rarely find time to go to health centres to seek medical assistance.
- (ii) A large number of women especially in the rural areas are illiterate and hence fail to understand the beginning symptoms of some big diseases. Men folk at home never bother to take them to seek medical advice well in time but pay a big price for it later when it is too late to get an easy cure.
- (iii) Impact of pollution, industrial wastes and smoke emanating from household biomass [made-up wood, dung, crop residues] stoves and also kerosene stoves on the health of women who work in a poorly ventilated house has been found to be serious. Such women suffer from eye problems, respiratory problems, chronic bronchitis, and lung cancer.
- (iv) Inability on the part of women to walk a long distance to reach a well equipped health centre in the absence of required transportation facility.
- (v) Non-availability of female doctors in the nearby health centres and reluctance of many women to seek medical check-up by male doctors.
- (vi) Parents often discriminate against their girl children by neglecting their sickness. When sick, little girls are not taken to the doctor as frequently as are their brothers. A study in Punjab shows that medical expenditure for boys are 2 to 3 times higher than for girls. As adults also women get less healthcare than men.

### PROBLEM OF NUTRITION

***Women are Denied Nutritious Food :*** Studies have revealed that gender disparities are evident from infancy to adulthood. Girls are breastfed less frequently and for shorter durations in infancy and childhood. Girl children and women do not consume much nutritious food like milk, curds, ghee, butter, fruits, eggs, etc., for they spare the same for the menfolk as a matter of family practice. According to one estimate from Punjab, adult women consume approximately 1000 less calories of food per day than men. Further, men are fed first and better than women. Nutritional equity between males and females is lower in northern than in southern states. It is observed that parents discriminate against their girl children by neglecting them during illness.

*Consequences of Nutritional Deprivation* : Nutritional deprivation has two major consequences on women : (i) they never reach full growth potential, and (ii) they suffer from anaemia. Both are risk factors in pregnancy. More than 40-50% of women in urban areas and 50-70% in rural areas are said to be suffering from anaemia. This condition complicates child-bearing and results in maternal and infant deaths and low birth weight infants.

One study has revealed that even in big cities like Calcutta [95%], New Delhi [73%], Hyderbad [67%], Chennai [18%] large number of girls aged between 6 and 14 suffer from anaemia. The prevalence of anaemia among women with age between 15 and 44 poses not only risks during pregnancy but also reduces their energy to carry on daily activities. Severe anaemic persons find it difficult even to walk at an ordinary pace.

#### 4. WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND GENDER BIAS IN EDUCATION

Social reformers and social thinkers believe that in a nation like India giving education to women in as large a number as possible can prove to be a panacea for many of the problems of women. Accordingly, much attention has been paid to the education of women after independence. The female literacy level has increased steadily. It has increased from 18.7% in 1971 to 39.42% in 1991 and to 54.16% in 2001. In spite of this change in the trend towards higher literacy, some problems have cropped up. We find glaring differences between the level of education of men and women.

##### Problems of Women Education in India

- It is found that *girls are being discouraged* to go for higher education that is, college and university level education and also for professional and technical education.
- *There are regional imbalances also.* In states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra, female education is encouraged and given almost equal importance. Whereas in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. education of girls is neglected even today. In 2001, *female literacy was highest in Kerala [88%]* whereas it was *lowest [35%]* in Bihar, while the average female literacy stood at

**54.16%**. The percentage of female literacy level, however, varies with different states. [See Table No. 1].

- **Rural - Urban Difference** : It is observed that literacy level in general is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Some difference is observed at the level of women also. *For example*, in 2001, female literacy was found to be **65.66%** in urban areas, whereas it was only **30.58%** in the rural areas.

- **Increasing drop-out of female children** from schools is another problem. Though female children are getting admitted to primary, middle and high schools in a substantial number, many of them drop out of the schools in the middle without completing the course. *For example*, as per the data furnished by the Ministry of Education [New Delhi], in 1984-85 the number of female children enrolled at primary school crossed the figure of 34.2 million, and at middle school level the enrolment crossed 9.2 million. More than 74% of these female children, between the age-groups of 6 and 14 years, quit schools and lapsed into ignorance.

- **Less Number of Girls' Admission to Schools** : Even in the matter of admitting children to school at elementary level, female children

Table - 1

#### LITERACY RATES IN MAJOR STATES OF INDIA - 2001

STATE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
	LITERACY RATE	LITERACY RATE	LITERACY RATE
Uttar Pradesh & Uttaranchal	71	44	58
Bihar & Jharkhand	62	35	49
Rajasthan	76	44	61
Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh	77	51	64
Haryana	79	56	69
Assam	72	56	64
Gujarat	80	59	70
Orissa	76	51	64
Maharashtra	86	68	77
Punjab	76	64	70
West Bengal	78	60	69
Karnataka	76	56	67
Andhra Pradesh	71	51	61
Tamil Nadu	82	65	73
Kerala	94	88	91
India	76	54	65.38

Source : Govt. of India [2001] Census of India 2001. Provisional Population Totals, Paper 1 of 2001.

are discriminated against male children. For example, in 1984-85, the admission of male children to school was around 90%, the percentage of female children was only 66.2. It means complete awareness is not there among people regarding female education.

**Low Level of Literacy Among Lower Classes :** In spite of the increasing awareness of the people towards the importance of education, a larger number of people, especially in the rural areas and many low classes and low castes, still believe that education for girls is not as important as that for boys. The rate of literacy is also very low in these communities.

- **Educational Gap Between Boys and Girls :** According to one estimate, in India, in spite of the growing literacy rate among women in the recent years, there exists a gap of about 20% between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education, that is, primary, secondary and higher level. Census reports also confirm the same. [See Table - 2]

### Gender Disparity in Education - A Global Perspective

- The rate of drop-out of female children from schools is higher than those of boys.

In a nation like Mali, 84% of girls have never attended schools; of those who attend, 60% dropout in the primary grades. In India, 50% of the girls dropout before completing the 5th std.

- Of the nearly **one billion** illiterate adults in the world, **2/3** are women living in South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and India.

LITERACY RATES BY SEX IN INDIA [1961 - 2001]

Table - 2

[In per cent]

Census Year	Females	Males	Persons	Male-Female gap in literacy rate
1961	12.95	34.44	24.02	21.49
1971	18.70	39.45	29.45	20.75
1981	20.76	56.38	43.57	26.62
1991	39.29	64.13	52.21	24.84
2001	54.16	75.85	65.38	21.69

Note : 1. Literacy rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 Censuses relate to population aged five years and above. The rates for the 1981, 1991 and 2001 Census relate to the population aged seven years and above.

Source : Census of India, 2001, "Provisional Population Totals".

In more than 29 countries, less than 30% of women are literate. The female literacy rate as a percentage of male literacy rate, is only 28% in Sudan, 39% in Somalia, 46% in Cambodia and 75% in Guatemala.

***Education - A key to Women Empowerment :*** Studies have revealed that education of girl children has its positive impact on infant mortality, maternal mortality, health and hygiene, productivity, etc. Education is a key to women empowerment which in turn is key to achieve various other developmental goals.

## GENDER BIAS IN EDUCATION

***Indian Education Commission*** had cautioned in 1966 itself that in educational programmes, syllabus etc., no attempt should be made to distribute responsibilities and roles on the basis of sex, and to inculcate the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', gender disparity, etc. It stressed that such attitudes should be kept outside the educational system. ***National Education Policy*** which came to be implemented in 1986 also made it clear that all impediments to popularise female education must be removed immediately. In spite of such official pronouncements gender disparities and bias in education have not come to an end.

***Gender Bias in the School Curriculum :*** Our syllabus system, textbooks, classroom teaching, co-curricular activities are still not free from gender bias. Examples of textbook lessons at primary level education may be considered here. "*Father is the head of the family*", "*Mother cooks food*", "*Daughter helps mother in the kitchen work*", "*Son goes to town along with the father for marketing*", "*Father and the son are sitting in the hall discussing politics, mother and daughter are spreading washed clothes for drying*", etc. Lessons, examples and photos depicting examples like these are bound to add to the existing gender bias. Our educational system has failed to project the image of a family in which men and women share among themselves all types of domestic work [including kitchen work, washing, cleaning and other work] and co-operate with each other for the smooth functioning of the family.

***Women's Achievements are Ignored :*** It is observed that in the school lessons, references relating to the achievements of women are almost nil. No attempts are made in them to present an impressive image of "empowered women". In providing teaching opportunities also

women candidates are preferred at primary and kindergarten levels, whereas men candidates are given priority at the higher - level. Even while selecting courses and subjects for study, gender bias is observed. Some courses are regarded as "more suitable for men" while some others are considered as "preferable to women". In matters such as treatment of male and female students, rules relating to dress, selection of candidates for sports events, distribution of responsibilities, etc., gender prejudice is experienced.

## 5. TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

*'Trafficking in women'* - refers to the heinous trade of luring, kidnapping and selling young girls and women for sexual purposes.

*It is also known as sex trade in which women are attracted, kidnapped or purchased by some secretly organised criminal agencies and compelled to offer sex services to the paying customers.*

The trafficking of women for sexual exploitation has unfortunately become a well organised criminal phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that violates basic human rights, and leads to total destruction of the victims' lives. It is estimated that on an average 12,000 cases of kidnapping and trafficking are reported every year in India. In the year 1993 itself as many as 12,426 cases of this crime were recorded.<sup>1</sup> On an average, in India, about 33 girls/women are kidnapped or abducted in a day. The extent of abduction in India is 2 per one lakh population.<sup>2</sup>

**Legislation is Ineffective :** Of the total victims abducted / kidnapped every year, 87% are females and 13% are males. On the issue of kidnappings, generally males are arrested [96%] and sometimes women are also taken to custody [only 4%]. The Act, namely, *Immoral Traffic in Persons [Prevention] Act, 1986* passed in this regard to protect women, has not been a success. Not only India, various other countries are affected by this problem in different ways. Some countries lose their women who are lured to desert their home countries permanently, only to end up in the sex industry abroad. Some other countries play their role mainly as transit countries. But many countries are "profited" by this 'trade' for they receive women who become the victims of sexual exploitation.

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1. Source : Ram Ahuja in "Social Problems in India" - Page : 245.

2. Source : Crime in India - 1993.

*Unwanted Girls are Often Sold* : India is also a victim of the criminal phenomenon of women trafficking. It is said that there are areas in India where female children are so unwanted that "if they are not killed, they are sold." In the tribal areas of Nalgonda [Andhra Pradesh], the girl child is a curse and female infanticide is common. An NGO [Non-Governmental Organisation] discovered that some people in this area found it easier to get rid of the unwanted child by way of selling it to some agency which exports the same to some foreign country. It is also reported that girls from India are being sold to Arab countries.<sup>1</sup>

*Trafficking in Women a Flourishing Trade* : Exporting girl children to foreign countries is a well organised flourishing trade. It has direct or indirect link with police, border forces, bureaucrats, hotel owners, long distance bus drivers and conductors and even the village level workers. One group locates and collects the girls while the other one provides the funds for shelter and spends money to silence the law enforcing authorities. Another group manages the export promotions. Some of these operators have their offices in Saudi Arabia and Oman. [V.B. Aggarwal]

## 6. GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

"Globalisation" represents one of the aspects of the new economic policy launched in the decades of 1980s and 1990s. The new economic policy has also made the economy outwardly oriented such that, its activities are now to be governed both by the domestic market and the world market. This will mean unification or integration of the domestic economy with the world economy. The measures taken by the Government of India added momentum to this progress.

The process of "globalisation" has today become one of the important issues of politico-economic discussions. In the media and also in the press this issue is getting lot of propaganda and publicity. In the first half of the 20th century, *the process of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation* were considered to be significant while at the fag end

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1. *The Centre of Concern for Child Labour*, in its report says that export of children gets a boost during the *Haj* season every year. The children are sent to *Mecca* and *Medina* for begging as the pilgrims make generous donations, not only in the form of money but also in the form gold ornaments. Some children are brought back but those with good looks and good health are held back. But where they disappear no one finds out." - Vir Bala Aggarwal in "Status of Women in Modern India" [2005] - Page : 6, Edited by S.B.Verma.

of the same century, the processes of computerisation, liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation became the most fashionable ones. Since 1990s, the issue of globalisation has become the most crucial one and almost every nation is directly or indirectly influenced by it.

- “Globalization means integrating the economy of a country with the world economy”.<sup>1</sup>
- The main purpose of globalisation is to integrate international market across the geographic and political boundary, so that goods, commodities, services, capital, labour and human population can move freely without any barrier and restriction from one corner to any other corner of the world.

## **Impact of Globalisation on Women**

Globalisation has led to some positive and many negative consequences. Globalisation has also affected womenfolk of the world in various ways. In fact, globalisation has led to some contradictory effects on women. In some respects, it benefits them while in some others, it has brought them great disadvantages.

### **● Some Positive Effects of Globalisation on Women**

**1. Greater Freedom to Women :** Globalisation has brought great freedom and exposure to women, especially in traditional and conservative countries like Indonesia, Ireland, Thailand, India, etc.

**2. It has given women economic independence.** By bringing women into workforce, globalisation has given women the economic power which they lacked in the past.

**3. Widened Better Employment Opportunities for Women :** Majority of women who entered workforce as a result of globalisation, are in the service sector-jobs which used to be well-paid and mostly occupied by men. *For example*, women today, in services like banking, insurance companies, computer software companies, have virtually displaced large number of men from their jobs.

**4. Globalisation has led to a radical improvement in the standard of living of the families** in which women are earning outside the home.

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1. S.K. Misra and V.K. Pure in “Indian Economy” [2000] - Page : 738.

Working women have started using labour - saving devices like cookers, washing machines, dish washers, vacuum cleaners, mixer-grinders, microwave ovens, etc., and these instruments have radically transformed women's lives in countries where they are easily afforded.

**5. It has hastened the emergence of child-care facilities** on a very wide scale. As a result, number of baby-sitting centres, kindergartens, creches, 'anganawadis', 'balawadis', etc., have come in. This provided lakhs of women jobs outside the family.

**6. It has led to the rise of fast food chains in society.** Since many women, especially those working in "white-collared" jobs in urban areas, are no longer at home for cooking food during the day time, the fast food producing industry received a great fillip. In fact, the fast food industry has also provided some job opportunities to women to prepare and supply food on contract basis.

### ● Some Negative Impacts on Women

**1. Increased Gender Disparity :** Since the benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed, wide economic gap is created between people leading to disparities. It has even increased gender inequality by providing unsafe working environment and unhygienic working conditions. Women are at a disadvantage in entering some jobs thrown open by globalisation. Married women with small children find it difficult to manage with those jobs which involve 'shift system', regular touring, vast field work, etc.

**2. Globalisation has led to feminisation of labour.** As more and more women are forced to look for employment, an overwhelming majority of this labour is being concentrated in low-wage industries like textiles, leather works, readymade dresses, footwear production, food processing, etc. These industries are notorious for exploiting their workers by denying them job security, their right to organise, etc. They are subject to long working hours without even being provided with basic amenities.

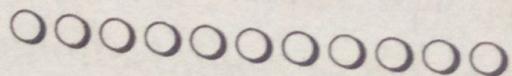
**3. Problem of Security and Protection for Working Women :** Globalisation open up vast job opportunities for women especially in the developing countries like India. In big cities, 'call centres' associated with business houses and industries are opened and these provide jobs

with attractive salaries to both men and women and make them work on shift system. The temptation of handsome salary has made many women take the risk of working in places where adequate security arrangements are not made for them. Such a situation has often led to sexual harassment and exploitation of women. The recent tragic episodes that took place in the "call centres" at Bangalore, are an example in this regard.

**4. Double Burden for Women :** Women are made to bear the brunt of "*double burden*", that is, one at office [or at workplace] and another at home. After their toil at the workplace, women are made to undertake "*second shift*" at home, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, vessels, serving food and caring for children and such other routine household works. Thus, women's growing participation in the paid labour force is not bringing them greater freedom and power as it was expected.

**5. Continuation of Family Traditions Disturbed :** Pre-occupation of women with jobs outside the family has its *adverse consequences on the maintenance and continuation of the family traditions and religious customs*. Employed parents, are no longer able to give cultural training to their children in family traditions and religious practices.

**6. Socialisation of Children Affected :** Employment of women outside the family has adversely affected the socialisation of children. The inability of employed women to spare enough time for their children has often resulted in emotional and psychic problems.



## UNIT IV

# STATE INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUITY

1. Constitutional Rights of Women
2. Laws Pertaining to Women
3. The National and State Commissions for Women.

Independent Indian Government has been showing great concern in protecting women's interests and promoting their welfare. It is giving greater importance to establish gender equality and assure social justice to women. With the primary objective of achieving development and empowerment of women it has launched time-bound projects and programmes. To supervise the working of these programmes supervisory teams have been constituted headed by the Chief Minister at the state level and Prime Minister at the central level.

Women in India constitute around 48.1% of the total population. It means almost half the population of India consisting of women constitute half of our "human resources". Hence, the Government has been focussing on the issue of development of women and children right from 1950s. In these 50 to 56 years, the philosophy of the governmental policy towards the issue of women has also been changing. For example, upto 1970s, the idea of "*promotion of women's welfare*" was the guiding philosophy. It has changed to the "*development of women*" in the 1980s, and from 1990 onwards, "*empowerment of women*" has become the main philosophy which is guiding all the major activities of the government oriented towards women's progress.

### Empowerment of Women Towards Gender Equity

- The term *empowerment of women* could be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

## Background to the Emergence of the Concept

Historically, women have been regarded as constituting a weaker section. They have often been treated as "*second grade citizens*". They have been pictured and presented as "*home-makers*" who are good in household cares. This image of women has been changing every where. Extension of the voting right to women in Britain and America in the beginning of the 20th century brought about a series of changes in the status of women especially in the western world. Many of their disabilities and inequalities came to an end in due course. The quest for equality was pursued consistently by the western women.

On the contrary, women of Asia and Africa were not able to secure equal status and opportunities even after 1950s. Women continued to suffer from one or the other kind of disability. Their exploitation also continued. They were given unequal treatment on the basis of sex. This development was termed as "*gender discrimination*", The United Nations through its various meetings and pronouncements was giving call to its member-nations to remove as early as possible, the ugly practice of "*gender discrimination*".

## Shift in the Emphasis From Women's "Welfare" to "Development"

Due to the efforts of the UNO, the issue of empowerment of women became an international issue. The UN declared the Year 1975 as the *International Women's Year*. Further, the UN Declaration of 1975 compelled the national governments to shift their emphasis on women's programmes from welfare to development. The Declaration prescribed for the all-round development of women.

## Women's World Congress' Insistence on Empowerment of Women

In continuation of the UN Declaration of 1975, the "*Third Women's World Congress*" [or conference] was held at Nairobi [Kenya] in 1985. A document released on this occasion recommended efforts towards empowerment of women.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing [China] in 1995 in which representatives from 189 nations including India

had taken part. The Conference recognised some 12 serious areas such as - women and poverty, health, economic position, media and rights, environment, girl child, human rights and women, institutional arrangement for women's development, women in decision - taking process, education and training for job, etc. in order to strengthen women. The Conference unanimously passed a resolution on "gender equality".

- *Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly* was also convened in the year 2000 in New York to assess the progress of the programmes held in the direction of establishing gender equality. The topic of the conference was "Women 2000 : Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century." Only the NGOs, [Non-Governmental Organisations] had to take part in it. The basic purpose of the conference was to convince the member nations regarding the need for empowering women and to take appropriate steps in that direction.

### The Indian Response Towards the Conference Issue

On the basis of the proceedings of the world conference of women, the Government of India prepared a *National Document* concerning the development of women. The document lays down various strategies for women's development. The Government also declared the year 2001 as the "*Year of Women's Empowerment*".

### STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

The *national document* which the Government of India had prepared with the intention of promoting women's development, highlights the importance of three strategies which are mentioned below.

(i) *Obtaining Greater Political Participation of Women* : The document recommends that 33% of the seats should be reserved for women in order to get the effective participation of women in politics. It was also recommended that some power positions and [posts] should be reserved for women at the block and village level bureaucracy. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts [1993] were passed primarily with this intention.

(ii) *Income Generating Schemes for Women* : On the economic front, a number of income-generating schemes were to be introduced to women as per the provisions of this document. It was insisted that sufficient provisions were to be made in all the rural developmental

programmes [such as, for example, IRDP: *Integrated Rural Developmental Programme*; JRY : *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana*; TRYSEM : *Training of Rural Youth and Self-Employment, Self-Help Groups [SHGs]* etc.] enabling a certain proportion of women to become their beneficiaries.

*(iii) Increasing Female Literacy Level :* On the social front, it was recommended to obtain proper co-ordination between governmental and non-government institutions to increase considerably the literacy level of women. It was hoped that with the help of literacy, women would be able to lead a life of self-reliance.

### THREE SPECIFIC AREAS OF STATE INITIATIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

India embraced democracy soon after its independence and accepted equality as an article of faith. It treats men and women as equal. It has taken initiative to uplift the position of women in all the possible ways. It is relevant here to confine our discussion to three important areas of state action towards gender equality. They are mentioned below.

1. *Constitutional rights of women,*
2. *Laws or Legislations pertaining to women,*
3. *The National and State Commissions for women.*

#### 1. CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

- Rights and Protection Assured to Women  
By the Constitution of India

The Constitution of India in its very preamble itself promises to secure to its citizens justice, liberty and equality. Right to *equality* has been enshrined as a Fundamental Right under chapter III of the Constitution. It assures social, economic and political *justice*, and guarantees *liberty* of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship to men and women alike.

The Constitution of India in its attempt to provide equal rights and opportunities to women, and to ensure protection and justice, has made the following provisions.

1. Constitution assures *equality before law* to all its citizens including women. [Article - 14].

## STATE INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUITY

2. Ensures that *no discrimination* be made against its citizens on the basis of caste, class, creed, race, sex, place of birth, religion or region [Article - 15(1)].
3. Does not deny or impose sanctions or conditions on its citizens to make use of any public place or institutions on the basis of sex, race, caste, religion, etc., [Article 15 (2)].
4. Recommends the State to make certain special arrangements in order to provide protection to women and children and to promote their welfare [Article - 15(3)].
5. *No discrimination be made by the State against its citizens* including women in matters *relating to employment* or, appointment to any office under the state [Article - 16].
6. To pursue a policy of providing the *minimum necessities of life to the citizen without discriminating between men and women*. The constitution also assures that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities [Article 39A].
7. The state to direct its policy to secure "*equal remuneration for equal work*" without discriminating between men and women. [Article 39 (d)]
8. *To provide just and human conditions for the citizens* to fulfil their occupational obligations. The state shall take it as its responsibility to provide maternity benefits for its women employees [Article - 42].
9. *Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests* : The state is directed to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of people including women, and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. [Article - 46]
10. *Promotion of Health* : The state has the responsibility of raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and to ensure the improvement of public health [Article - 47]
11. *Promoting harmony and the spirit of fraternity* among people and doing away with all the humiliating and derogatory customs in respect of women so as to maintain the dignity of women. [Article 51 (A) and (e)].
12. *1/3 Reservation For Women in the Panchayats* : Reserving not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats for women in the Panchayats [including the women belonging to the SCs and STs] for which direct elections are held. These reserved seats in the range of the Panchayats are to be kept on rotation basis. [Article - 243 D (3)].

13. *1/3 of Reservation for women in the Presidential Posts of the Panchayats* : Reserving not less than 1/3 of the total number of the presidential posts for women at all the levels of the Panchayat [Gram Panchayat, Thaluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat] systems [Article 243D (4)].
14. *1/3 of the Reservation for Women in the Municipalities* : Reserving not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats for women in the town municipalities [including the women belonging to the SCs and STs] for which direct elections are held. These reserved seats in the range of the town municipalities are to be kept on rotation basis [Article 243T (3).].
15. *Reservation for Women in the Presidential Posts of the Town Municipalities* : While reserving the presidential posts of the town municipalities for women and also for the SCs and the STs, the relevant law framed by the state legislative body is to be followed. [Article 243T (4)].

## **2. LAWS PERTAINING TO WOMEN OR LEGISLATIVE MEASURES SAFEGUARDING WOMEN'S INTERESTS**

Independent Indian Government has undertaken a number of legislative measures with a view to promote the welfare of women and to safeguard their interests. In tune with various provisions of the Constitution, the State has enacted various legislations to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of *sati*, etc. Some such Acts or legislations are mentioned below.

Some of the legislations which were undertaken with more or less the same intentions during the British period, were also retained, and they are still in force. A list of both the types of these legislations is given below.

### **● Social Legislations Introduced During the British Rule**

**1. The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 :** This legislation was complementary to the previous social legislation, the first of its kind, i.e., '*The Prevention of Sati Act of 1829*'. Though widows were saved from the jaws of death they were subject to exploitation and humiliation. To remove the deplorable condition of the Hindu widows, a leading

social reformer of the day, **Pandit Ishwara Chandra Vidya Sagar**, brought pressure on the British Govt. to make legal provision for widow marriages. *The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856* was hence passed. It removes restrictions imposed on the remarriage of widows.

**2. The Indian Divorce Act, 1869** lays down the conditions under which Christians can obtain or seek divorce through the court. It also deals with the dissolution of the marriage declaring the marriage as null and void on the specific grounds. It provides for judicial separation, protection to the spouses and restitution of conjugal rights.

**3. The Indian Christian Marriage Act 1872 :** This legislation [including its Amendments up to 1928] covers various aspects of Christian marriage. *The legislation strictly prohibits the practice of polygamy and polyandry among them and prescribes strict monogamy.* Several aspects such as – who should perform marriage, the place where it is to be performed [in which church], the time of performance, the relative age of the boy and the girl concerned, etc., are all dealt with by this legislation.

**4. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 :** This Act came into force on April 1, 1930. The Act prohibited the marriage of a child. According to this Act, marriage of boys under 18 and girls under 14 years of age was an offence. In its amended version, the age at marriage was fixed at **21** for boys and **18** for girls.

**5. The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936 :** This is an Act which governs the marriage and divorce that take place among the Parsis. It was amended and expanded in 1988 and it is now almost equal to the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.

**6. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939** entitles a married Muslim woman to seek dissolution of her marriage on some specific grounds. [For example, whereabouts of husband not known for 4 years, husband's imprisonment for 7 years; husband's impotency, cruelty on the part of the husband, husband's insanity for at least 2 years, failure to provide for maintenance for more than 2 years, in case the marriage is thrust on her before she attained the 15th year; etc.] Prior to this Act, giving divorce was only the privilege of the husband.

#### • Legislations Undertaken After Independence

**1. The Special Marriage Act, 1954** which provides rights to women on par with men for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and

## STATE INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUITY

registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females.

2. **The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** which prohibits polygyny, polyandry and child marriage also concedes equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry. The main provisions of this Act are mentioned below.
  - (i) This Act gives permission for intercaste and inter-religious marriages; (ii) It provides for equality of sex; (iii) It provides equal rights for men and women in marriage, divorce or separation; (iv) Its 1986 amendment permits divorce on the ground of incompatibility and mutual consent; (v) During judicial separation and after divorce, both husband and wife have the right to claim maintenance allowance.
3. **The Hindu Succession Act, 1956** according to which not only a daughter is given a right in her father's property equal to her brothers, but a widow also gets a share in her deceased husband's property equal to her sons and daughters.
4. **The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956** which gives a childless woman the right to adopt a child and to claim maintenance from the husband if she is divorced by him.
5. **The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, [SITA] 1956** which gives protection to women from being kidnapped and/or compelled to become prostitutes.
- The above Act was amended and changed into the "Prevention of Immoral Traffic in Persons Act" [PITA] in 1986. The main purpose of the Act was to broaden the definition of immoral trafficking to include any person, i.e., male children and men in addition to women and girls, offering sexual services. The other main thrust of the amendment is to enhance punishments for prostitutes and brothel keepers and others connected with the trade except the male clients and create new categories of offences.<sup>1</sup>

1. *This amended version of the Act includes three important things :* (i) Police raids [without warrants] can take place to any brothel home or place of prostitution only with the assistance of at least two female police officers. (ii) Interrogation can be done only by women police officers or in the presence of a female member of a recognised welfare institution. These two clauses are added to maintain the dignity of the prostitute as a woman. (iii) The Act also incorporates a new clause concerning rehabilitation of prostitutes.

6. *The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961* which gives maternity benefits such as two months leave with salary to the married women workers in the organised sector.
7. *The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961* which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.<sup>1</sup>  
The above Act was amended in 1984 and also again in 1986 and it now reads as - *Dowry Prohibition Amendment Act, 1984*.
8. *The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971* which legalises abortion conceding the right of a woman to go for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.
9. *Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act, 1994* : This Act was specially designed to prevent selective foeticide [that is, removing unwanted girl child] under the pretext of saving health.
10. *The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976*, which removes wage discrimination between male and female workers.
11. *The Factories Amendment Act, 1976* which includes provisions dealing with working laws, weekly rest, standards of cleanliness, ventilation, temperature, first-aid facilities, rest rooms etc. The legislation also provides for establishing of creches for children [if the factory employs 30 or more women]; separate toilets for females and lays down a maximum of 9 hours of work a day for women and no employment of women during night, that is, between 10-00 P.M. and 5-00 A.M.
12. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983* which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.
13. *The Family Court Act, 1984*, which seeks to provide justice to women who get involved in family disputes.
14. *The Indecent Representation of Women [Prohibition] Act, 1986* prevents the media from misrepresenting the women. Any attempt

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1. The focus of the amendments in the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was three fold : (i) Its main focus was to make punishments for both givers and takers of dowry, more stringent, (ii) It intended to widen the definition of dowry, so as to include 'costly gifts' demanded at the time of marriage and such other things, (iii) The third focus is to extend woman's control over dowry items - This Act is, however, regarded as the one which has lot of inherent contradictions.<sup>1</sup>

to degrade and discredit women, insult and humiliate them, assassinate the character of women, and present them in an indecent manner is declared punishable. The provisions of this Act are applicable to all the means of the mass media and also to advertisements, books, handbills, posters, etc. Violation of this Act is liable for punishment, which amounts to 2000 Rs. fine and 2 years imprisonment.<sup>1</sup>

15. *Commission of Sati [Prevention] Act, 1987* : During the British rule itself this inhuman practice was declared unlawful as per *The Sati Prevention Act, 1829*. Some reported instances of the practice of 'Sati' that took place after independence [i.e., in 1986] compelled the Central Government to make the Act more stringent by giving a new shape to it in the form of *Commission of Sati [Prevention] Act, 1987*.<sup>2</sup>
16. *Muslim Women's Protection of Rights on Divorce Act 1986 and Iddat* : Provides the right for a divorced Muslim wife to demand from her husband her maintenance during the Iddat [that is, the waiting period of three months.]
17. *The National Commission for Women Act, 1990* : As per the provisions of this Act, "The National Commission for Women" was set up on 31st Jan 1992 to ensure better legal protection for women.

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1. Though the law on obscenity already existed in the *Indian Penal Code*, a need was felt to specifically prohibit obscene representation of women as sexual objects for commercial gain in advertisements, posters and in other media. Indecent representation of women has been defined to mean "*the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof, in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or derogatory to, or denigrating women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the morality or morals.*" - as quoted by **Sadhana Arya** in "*Women, Gender Equality and the State*" - 2000, Page : 237. - Publisher : Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

2. The public burning of **Roopa Kanwar** on Sept 4, 1987, termed as "sati" and state-response to the incidence opened up this issue of the practice of 'sati' for further discussion. The state of Rajasthan quickly responded to the incident. In October 1987, *The Rajasthan Sati [Prevention] Ordinance* was passed which was followed by a Central legislation in Jan. 1988. *The Commission of Sati [Prevention] Act, 1988* was passed through both the houses of the Parliament in a hurried manner. The Act states that - "*Sati or the burning or burying alive of widows is revolting to the feelings of human nature and is nowhere enjoined by any of the religions of India as an imperative duty.*" - **Sadhana Arya** in "*Women, Gender, Equality and the State*". Page : 240. The state's hesitation in calling 'sati' an act of murder, because of the supposed religious sanction behind it, - has been criticised by the radicals.

## Legal Protection to Women Through THE INDIAN PENAL CODE [IPC]

*Indian Penal Code* [IPC] also gives protection to women especially when crimes are committed against them.

- *The seven crimes under the IPC are : rape, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for dowry, torture, [physical and mental], molestation, eve-teasing, and importation of girls up to 21 years of age.*
- *Four crimes under the local and special laws are : commission of sati, dowry prohibition, immoral traffic, and indecent representation of women.*

Reported cases of crimes identified under the IPC are taken up for giving justice to women. It is said that as many as 80,000 cases of crimes against women under the IPC, are being recorded every year. Some sections of the IPC deal with such specific cases of crimes against women. *Examples:*

1. *Kidnapping and Abduction of Women* : Cases of this kind are tackled according to *Sections 363 - 373 IPC*
2. *Rape* : Instances of rape are dealt with under *Section - 376, IPC*.
3. *Molestation* attempts are handled as per *IPC Section - 354*.
4. *Torture Both Mental and Physical* : Complaints of this nature are dealt with under *Section - 498 - A IPC*.
5. *Sexual Harassment* of women of any sort is taken up as per *Section - 509 IPC*.
6. *Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or Their Attempts* : Complaints of this kind are taken up seriously as per *IPC Sections 302/304 B.<sup>1</sup>*

## 3. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN [NCW]

The Central Government established as per the provisions of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 statutory body namely "National Commission for Women" [NCW] in 1992. Its main purpose

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1. *Amendment made to IPC Section 304 B in 1986* : It now reads as - *Section 304B - Dowry Death* : Where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise 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 death shall be called "dowry death" and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death.

The offence is punishable with a minimum of seven years and a maximum of life-imprisonment. The presumption of guilt is on the accused and he would have to prove that he is innocent.

is to protect the rights and interests of women and to deal with matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women. In fact, the Committee on the Status of Women in India [C.S.W.I.] had recommended nearly two decades prior to that the necessity of setting up such a commission to supervise the functions of the Government aimed at the redressal of the grievances of women. The committee also felt that such a Commission would help to accelerate the socio-economic and educational development of women.

### ● The Structure of the Commission

The Commission for women has a woman Chairman, 5 members, and a Member Secretary of IAS cadre, all nominated by the Central Government. It is mandatory that out of these 5 nominated members one should be from the S.C. and the OBC communities. The tenure of office of all these nominated members is 3 years. **Smt. Jayanthi Patnayak** had functioned as its first president [1992 - 1995] and **Smt. Girija Vyas** is its present national level President.

### ● State Level Women's Commissions

In addition to the NCW, several states of India also established ***State Women's Commission*** [SWC]. By 2001, as many as 17 states had their own SWCs. The Karnataka Government established its first "***State Women's Commission***" in Aug 1996 and **Smt. M. Prabhavathi** became its first president.

### Functions of the Women's Commission

- (i) The basic task of this Commission is to protect the rights of women and to promote their interests.
- (ii) Commission continues to pursue its mandatory activities, namely, review of legislations, interventions in specific individual complaints of atrocities and remedial action to safeguard the interests of women.
- (iii) The Commission has accorded highest priority to securing speedy justice to women.
- (iv) Another main function of these Commissions [State as well as National level commission] is to inquire into the "*unfair practices*" meted out to women which includes "*mental and physical torture*".
- (v) Its other functions include studying inadequacies in laws, monitoring enforcement of laws, inspecting prisons, police stations, lock-ups, refuges for women victims of violence, etc.

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- (vi) It makes recommendations for prosecution in individual cases.
- (vii) It probes into the alleged cases of gender disparity and if required, provides financial help to fight out litigations on behalf of women.
- (viii) It submits reports regularly to the government regarding the conditions of women in general, and their problems and grievances in particular. These reports are placed before both the houses of the parliament along with the recommendations.

### NCW in the Action Front

- *The Commission Receives Complaints about Various Issues Affecting Women* : The NCW has been receiving complaints relating to issues such as - domestic violence, harassment, dowry, torture, desertion, bigamy, rape, refusal to register FIR, cruelty by husband, deprivation, gender discrimination and sexual harassment at workplace, etc. It takes necessary steps in these matters to protect women's interests and provide justice to them.
- *Expediting Investigations* : NCW tackles the problems by ensuring that investigations by the police are expedited and monitored
- *Providing Counselling Service* : Due to the Commission's mediatory role family disputes are resolved or compromised through counselling.
- *Institutes Inquiry Committees* : For various crimes of serious nature, the Commission constitutes Inquiry Committee which makes spot enquiries, examines various witnesses, collects evidence, and submits the report with recommendations. The implementation of the report is monitored by the NCW.
- *Conducts Seminars, Workshops, etc.* : The Commission conducts seminars, workshops and conferences and also sponsors such events by providing financial assistance to research organisations and the NGOs. The seminar and workshop topics already covered include - Violence against women, sexual harassment at workplace, women in agriculture and *Panchayat Raj* sector, educational, health and employment aspects of women, women in detention, custodial justice to women, etc.
- *Institutes Studies Relating to Issues* : NCW has conducted special studies on issues related to women. *Examples* : Women labour under contract, divorced women, gender bias in judicial decisions and family courts, gender component in various commissions' reports on women, *Panchayat Raj* in action, women's access to health and education in slums.

violence against women, mentally disabled women, credit needs of women, socio-economic development of SC women, women of weaker section, and so on. These studies are of great help in the formulation of NCW's policies for recommendations.

- *Library, Books and Publications* : The NCW has started its own library in 1994 which has a collection of nearly 2300 books covering different issues relating to women's advancement. The library has a good number of reference books also. The NCW makes its own publications from time to time and sponsors research studies on various aspects concerning women issues. The NCW has so far brought out nearly 100 publications both in English and Hindi.

- *Visiting States* : The Commission visits different states to evaluate the progress of development of women. It has already visited and evaluated the position of women in states such as Tamil Nadu, A.P., U.P., M.P., Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Assam, Tripura and Manipura.

- *Interaction With the Media* : The Commission interacts with the NGOs and the State Commissions for ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women. The Commission also maintains interaction with the media, social activists and university level professors and scholars to suggest ways of protecting women's interests and ensuring proper means of representation to women in all spheres.

## SOME SPECIAL INITIATIVES OF THE STATE TO PROMOTE THE CAUSE OF WOMEN

The independent Indian Government has undertaken a number of measures particularly in the sectors of health, education, rural and urban development, employment, education, etc. with a view to promote the development and welfare of women. Some of them may be briefly mentioned here.

### 1. Educational Development Plan for Women

The University Grants Commission had stressed as early as in 1948 the essential need for the education of women. *The Central Education Department, the [NCERT] National Council of Educational Research and Training, the [NAEP] National Adult Education Programme* and other institutions have evinced greater interest in providing educational facilities for women.

- **Women Study Centres** have been established with the assistance of [UGC] University Grants Commission to study the status of women and problems and issues concerned with women.

- **Other Institutions:** Institutions such as - (i) **UNICEF:** United Nations' International Children's Educational Fund; (ii) **ICSSR:** Indian Council of Social Science Research; (iii) **UNESCO:** United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation; (iv) **CSIR:** Council of Scientific and Industrial Research; (v) **Ford Foundation**, etc. have shown a special interest in studying women's problems.

## 2. Programmes for Improving Women's Health

Various organisations, independent surveys and studies conducted by prominent individuals and private institutions brought to the notice of the Central Government at different times between 1975-85 the urgent need for improving women's health. Various governmental agencies such as "Indian Council of Medical Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Central Government Health Services Scheme [CGHS] etc. have been paying much attention to promote women's health.

- **In rural areas** institutional systems such as rural Primary Health Centres and Family Welfare Centres are trying to promote women's health. World Health Organisation, World Bank and Ford Foundation are also showing concern in providing medical protection to women and children.

## 3. Department of Women and Child Development

The Ministry of Human Resources Development opened [in 1985] a new department under its purview namely Department of Women and Child Development with the sole purpose of assisting women and children to develop into their full potentials. This department also intends to bring proper co-ordination between the government and the NGO's which are striving to promote the development of women. This department prepared a "National Policy of the Empowerment of Women in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

## 4. The Central Social Welfare Board

The Central Social Welfare Board [CSWB] was set up in 1953 with the objective of promoting social welfare activities and implementing welfare programmes for women, children and the handicapped through

voluntary organisations. The CSWB is unique in the sense that it was the first organisation in post independent era to achieve people's participation for implementation of welfare programmes for women and children through the Non-Government Organisations [NGOs].

The CSWB established by the *Planning Commission*, has its own women welfare programmes such as *providing housing protection to weak and helpless women, fallen women, helpless widows; creating centres of social education for women and adult education centres, condensed courses of education and vocational training courses for women and girls, awareness generation projects for rural and poor women, family counselling centres, holiday camps for children, welfare extension projects in border areas, opening centres for giving healthy entertainment to the women, giving assistance to creches and hostels for working women, etc.* The Board gives financial subsidy of Rs. 50,000/- annually to those private agencies [NGOs] which provide good service to the women. Presently, more than 18,000 NGOs are receiving financial assistance and guidance from the Board.

- *Voluntary Organisation in the Service of Women :* (i) *Mobile Creches* for working mother's children aged upto 12 years; (ii) "Annapoorna" women's co-operative Society to provide mid-day meal to working women; (iii) *Self-Employed Women Association*, a registered trade union to organise women rag-pickers, head-loaders, junksmith, fish vendors, bamboo-workers, beedi workers, block-printers, used garment dealers has come into being to get a fair deal for women workers.

## 5. Economic Development Programmes For Women

Through various schemes the Central and the State Governments have been trying to promote the economic development of women - among which the following may be noted. 1. Self-Help Groups [SGHS], 2. Institute

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1. *Stree Shakti Scheme [Self-Help Groups - SGHs] to Empower Women Economically : Karnataka Model* : In order to empower rural women economically, the Karnataka Government [under the Chief Ministership of S.M. Krishna] launched the '*Stree Shakti Scheme*' to forge "*Self-help Groups*" among women. *Purposes* : (i) To strengthen the process of economic development of women. (ii) To establish at least **one lakh** SHGs during 2000-2001. (iii) To enhance financial stability in rural women by involving them in income generating activities such as producing - detergent powder, cleaning powder, bleaching powder, candle making, coirs, mat-making, toy-making, agarbatti making, etc. This scheme was intended to empower at least two million rural women in Karnataka by the end of the year 2002. These SGHs seem to be functioning comparatively well in many of the rural areas of Karnataka even at present.

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for Providing Vocational Training for Women, 3. Women's National Training Institute, 4. Working Women's Hostels, 5. The National Committee for Women Welfare, 6. Social Assistance Schemes, 7. The Scheme of Training Cum - Employment, Cum Production Centres, 8. Rastriya Mahila Kosh (1992), 9. Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, 10. Indira Mahila Yojana (1995), 11. Women's Development Corporation [WDC - 1986-87], 12. Welfare and Support Services, and so on.

### 6. Other Programmes and Schemes for the Development of Women

In 1985 the Government of India Constituted a separate department in the Ministry of Human Resource Development for the development of Women and Children. During the Sixth and Seventh Plan period, a number of programmes were envisaged :

- (1) Women's Development Corporation [WDC's]
- (2) Support to Training and Employment Programme [STEP]
- (3) Awareness Generation Camps for Rural and Poor Women
- (4) Women's Training Centres or Institutes for Rehabilitation of Women in Distress.
- (5) Voluntary Action Bureau and Family Counselling Centres
- (6) Short Stay Homes for Women and Girls
- (7) Free legal aid and Para-legal training, and
- (8) Working Women's Hostels

### 7. Observance of Women's Day and Other Programmes by the Government

The Government has been expressing its concern towards women by organising various programmes among which the following may be noted.

- (i) The year 1975 was observed as "*International Year of Women*" as per the call of the UNO.
- From 1975 onwards, the *8th Day of March* is being observed as "*International Women's Day*".
- (ii) The year 1990 was observed as "*SAARC year of the Girl Child*".
- (iii) The Decade between 1991-2000 AD was observed as "*The SAARC Decade of the Girl Child*".
- (iv) The year 2001 was observed as the "*Year of Women's Empowerment*".

