

UNIT 13 GENDER AS A BASIS OF DISCRIMINATION

Structure

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13.2.2 Sociological Theory of Sex Roles

13.3 Perspectives on the Evolution of Sex Differences

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the meaning and definition of sex role;
- elaborate reasons for sex role stereotypes;
- discuss various theories regarding sex roles;
- outline the sexual division of labour and gender stratification; and
- explain the subjugation of women in different societies.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Every human being is a man or woman by sex. The part played by an individual in the course of social interaction is called as "role" Men and women play different roles. Sex role is the role played by an individual due to his or her sex. Later there is the development of sex role stereotype. In a male dominated society the men's roles are given a higher status and whatever a woman does is rated as low.

The anatomical differences were for a long time viewed as intimately related to differences in emotional and intellectual capacities, as well as differences in physical abilities. The

tasks and roles assigned to men and women in our own cultural tradition were assumed to be correlated highly with anatomically based aptitudes.

Patriarchy, means to serve the interest of the male sex. The sex role division is such that men are for production and women for reproduction. The unpaid, unseen household work is considered lower than the work done by men outside the house. Women are sexually vulnerable; therefore many societies put a lot of restrictions on them and many rituals and taboos are linked to the various biological events in life.

13.2 THEORIES OF SEX ROLES

We will now discuss various aspects of the theories of sex roles.

13.2.1 Biological Theory of Sex Roles

George Peter Murdock sees biological differences between men and women as the basis for sexual division of labour in society. Men have more physical strength and therefore they take such roles which require physical strength. Women can bear children and therefore they are associated with activities that are related to the raising of family.

Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox say that biological factors programme human behaviour though there may be cultural variations. They call it "human biogrammer" and there is some difference in the biogrammer of men and women.

Talcott Parsons characterizes women's role in the family as "expressive" which provides emotional support and warmth necessary for the socialization of the child. The man's role on the other hand is "instrumental" as the bread winner of the society. Both the expressive and instrumental roles are essential and they complement each other.

13.2.2 Sociological Theory of Sex Roles

According to a British sociologist Ann Oakley, sex is a biological term and gender is a cultural term. Gender refers to the sex of an individual after socialization.

Oakley argues that division of labour is not universal. She disagrees with Murdock. She regards it as a myth that women are biologically incapable to carry out heavy and demanding work. She also noted that employment of mothers is not detrimental to the children's development. According to her Parson's explanation of woman's "expressive role" and men's instrumental role, is for the convenience of men.

Emile Durkhiem, one of the founding fathers of sociology, said that in the primitive societies men and women were fairly similar in strength and intelligence and only as civilization progressed new codes evolved which restricted women from working outside home. Thus they became weaker and less intelligent.

The process of socialisation begins the moment a person is born. Sex roles are learned activities as children are socialized into these roles. Thus sex role allocation is a social phenomenon and is in fact learned behaviour. Women for centuries have been socialized into passive roles.

13.3 PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVOLUTION OF SEX DIFFERENCES

The earlier anthropologists like Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown etc. had under valued the role of women. All their studies were centered round males. Moreover, it was through the males in the village they got information about community life as well as the role of women in the community. This male bias was criticized by Margaret Mead, who studied primitive societies of Pacific Ocean Islands.

In the era between the late 1930's and the mid 1960's cross cultural data on the sexual division of labour very quickly dispelled the idea that men (or women) are unable to do some tasks assigned to women (or men) in our culture. Knitting, weaving and cooking sometimes fall into the male province while such things as pearl diving, canoe handling and house building turn out to be women's work in some settings. A noted anthropologist

Margaret Mead's pioneering research on tribes in the Pacific raised these issues. She found that sex roles and personality in these tribes were contrary to what are found in the western world. Hence she raised doubts about the biological basis of these roles.

However gender differences do exist in the simple society in the hunting and gathering societies. Hunting is a male activity because it involves long travelling and women find it difficult, due to their reproductive and nurturing function. But the women in these societies work very hard and are good and skilled in discriminating between edible and inedible plants and fruits, reading the tracks of animals etc. Hence the actual physical labour of women is no different from that of men. Yet dominance of males in these societies lead to ascribing different statuses for work.

Freidle notes that tasks assigned to men carry higher prestige though the same tasks done by women in other societies do not carry the same prestige. This is primarily due to male dominance which results from the fact that man's life is more public and woman's life is more private due to child bearing and child rearing. Men thus claim greater rights than women to distribute goods outside the domestic group. When man hunts the flesh is shared by the total community but when a woman gathers by way of food it is shared only by the family members. Men have greater control over exchange of valued goods.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : Compare your answer with one at the end of the unit:

- 1) Say True or False
 - a) Men and women play different roles (T/F)
 - b) Gender is a biological term. (T/F)
 - c) The process of socialization begins the moment a person is born. (T/F)
- 2) Fill in the blanks
 - a)sees biological differences between men and women as basis of division of labour.
 - b)studied primitive societies of Pacific Ocean Islands.

13.4 COLONIALISM AND DEVELOPMENT

We live today in a global world based on complex political and economic relationship. Although most of the colonized world achieved independence by the 1960's, the economic domination of the capitalist world system that was initiated during the colonial period had not been significantly altered. In the late twentieth century an imbalanced relationship between the countries of the industrial or "developed" world and the developing or Third World remains. How have the men and women of the developing world experienced the continuing impact of the penetration of capitalism and the integration of their societies into the global economy.

In many parts of the world, originally egalitarian gender relationships have been replaced by more hierarchical ones, and women have consequently been marginalized, removed from the positions of economic and political decision making that they held in the pre colonial period.

If women got any attention it was as mothers and housekeepers in family planning projects and in training programs for home economics. Male centered development programs often resulted in new division of labour between the sexes, by which the dependency of women on men greatly increased.

Greater female dependency on men has also resulted from the process of urbanization, from the shift from household to factory and industry, from the introduction of cash crops. In some societies women have lost their traditional rights to land and men, though continuing to rely on women's traditional assistance, claim the entire income from the cash production export crops for themselves.



Women sweeping the compound clean
Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

13.5 IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT ON WOMEN

Indian demographers have proposed several hypotheses to explain the declining sex-ratio, and five of these suggest important contributing factors.

- i) Females are under enumerated in the Indian census.
- ii) The general mortality rates of females are higher than those of males.
- iii) Indian families prefer sons and female infants are consequently neglected leading to higher female mortality.
- iv) Frequent and excessive child bearing has an adverse effect on the health of women.
- v) Certain diseases have higher incidence in women.

This raises the whole question of attitudes towards females and the role of women in Indian society.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a preference for boys lies at the heart of the inferior status of women and girls in India and many other countries. Equally disturbing are the increasing indications that when public services – ranging from medical and health facilities to agricultural extension projects – are provided in the course of development efforts, they may either reinforce the traditional male biases or diminish the status that women enjoyed in the traditional society.

13.5.1 Female Infanticide and Child Neglect in Rural India

It is beyond doubt that systematic indirect female infanticide exists today in India in addition to the sex selective abortion (i.e. female foeticide) and female infanticide (killing of a child under one year of age). It was found that in certain villages in Rajasthan there were no female children. In Salem district in Tamil Nadu female infanticide is openly practiced.

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The indirect female infanticide accomplished by nutritional and health care deprivation of

children results in higher mortality rates of daughters than sons. In several parts of rural India there is a strong preference for sons. Sons are considered as economic assets, they are needed for farming and for income through remittances if they leave the village etc. Sons play important roles in local power struggles over rights to land and water. Sons stay with the family after their marriage and thus maintain the parents in their old age, daughters marry out and cannot contribute to the maintenance of their natal households. Sons bring in dowries with their brides, daughters drain family wealth with their required dowries and constant flow of gifts to their family of marriage after the wedding. Sons, among Hindus are also needed to perform rituals which protect the family. After the death of the father, daughters cannot perform such rituals. The extreme son preference is more prevalent among upper castes and classes than the lower castes and classes.

13.5.2 Gender Household and Kinship

Let us now take the example of Taiwanese women. These women marry into the household of their husbands. According to Wolf a Taiwanese wife must pay homage to her husband's ancestors, obey her husband and mother in law, and bear children for her husband's patrilineage. After Taiwanese wife gives birth to a son, her status in the household begins to change and it improves during her life course as she forges what Wolf calls a uterine family – a family based on the powerful relationship between mothers and sons. When a Taiwanese wife becomes a mother in law she achieves the greatest power and status within her husband's household.

13.5.3 Views of Engels Leacock

According to Engels Leacock the early communal society was self sufficient. Men and women work together and neither of them were dependent on each other. Thus there was a reciprocal division of labour. Also there was no distinction between the public world of men's work and private world or women's household work. Both the sexes produced the goods necessary for livelihood. Thus in this type of society, goods were produced only for consumption to satisfy everyday needs. Later on as the process of industrialization began goods were produced on a large scale, concepts of trading and exchange became common. Slowly in order to maximize their profits the capitalists started exploitation of the women and workers. This led to the isolation of family as a separate unit and the women were then confined to their families and thus the place of work and residence was separated.

13.5.4 Equality and Inequality: The Sexual Division of Labour and Gender Stratification

In most societies certain tasks are predominantly assigned to men while others are assigned to women. In European and American cultures it used to be considered "natural" for men to be the family bread winners, women were expected to take care of the home and raise the children. An underlying assumption of this division of labour was that men were dominant because their contribution to the material well being of the family was more significant than that of women. Women were dependent on men and therefore automatically sub-ordinate to them.

The "naturalness" of this division of labour has been called into question as women increasingly enter the labour force. However has this significantly altered the status of women within their families and in the wider society? Or has it simply meant that women are now working a double day, performing domestic tasks that are negatively valued and not considered work once they get home from their "real" day's work? If employment enhances the social position of women, why is it that women still earn only 65% of what men earn for the same work? Why is there still a high degree of occupational segregation by gender?

What precisely is the relationship between the economic roles of women and gender stratification?

Cross cultural research on the sexual division of labour attempts not only to describe the range of women's productive activities in societies with different modes of subsistence, but also to assess the implications of these activities on the status of women.

13.5.5 The Cultural Construction of Gender

We all live in a world of symbols that assign meaning and value to the categories of male

and female. Despite several decades of consciousness raising in the United States, advertising on television and in the print media perpetuates sexual stereotypes. Although “house beautiful” ads are less prominent as women are increasingly shown in workplace contexts, body beautiful messages continue to be transmitted. In children’s cartoons women are still helpless victims who the fearless male hero must rescue. Toys are targeted either for little boys or little girls and are packed appropriately in colours and materials culturally defined as either masculine or feminine. Argues that women, because of their reproductive roles, are universally viewed as being closer to nature while men are linked with culture. She defines culture in terms of human consciousness including the products of the same like, technology which is used to control and harness nature. That which is cultural and subject to human manipulation is assigned more worth than that which is natural, hence women and women’s roles are degraded or devalued, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What does the cross cultural research on the sexual division of labour aim at? Give your answer in about ten lines.

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- 2) Why is there a strong preference of sons in the North India? Give your answer in about ten lines.

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13.8 FURTHER READINGS

Caroline B. Bettell, Carolyn F. Sargent (ed.) (1993), *Gender in Cross Cultural Perspective*, New Jersey Prentice Hall.

13.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) True
b) False
c) True
- 2) a) George Peter Murdock
b) Margaret Mead

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Cross cultural research on the sexual division of labour attempts not only to describe the range of women's productive activities in societies with different modes of subsistence, but also to assess the implication of these activities on the status of women.
- 2) In the rural North India there is a strong preference for sons. Sons are considered as economic assets, they are needed for farming, for income through remittances if they leave the village. Sons play important roles in the local power struggles. Sons stay with their parents after their marriage and maintain the parents in their old age. Sons bring dowries with their brides. Sons are also needed to perform rituals after the death of the father.
- 3) Engels Leacock observed that in early communal society, the division of labour between the sexes was reciprocal and the wife and her children were not dependent on the husband. Distinction did not exist between a public world of men's work and a private world of women's household service. The large collective household was the community and both the sexes worked to produce goods necessary for livelihood. The exploitation of women began with the emergence of individual family as an isolated unit and women's labour was considered as a private service in the context of the family.

UNIT 14 FORMATION OF GENDER IDENTITIES

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Body as an Instrument of Social Control
 - 14.2.1 Concept of Body
 - 14.2.2 Sociological Understanding of Body
 - 14.2.3 Communicative Body
- 14.3 Factors Leading to Gender Identities
 - 14.3.1 Socialization Process
 - 14.3.2 Culture
 - 14.3.3 Religion
 - 14.3.4 Education
 - 14.3.5 Communication and Media
 - 14.3.6 Language
 - 14.3.7 Context or Social Environment
- 14.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.5 Key Words
- 14.6 Further Readings
- 14.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would help in the process of understanding:

- the concepts of formation of self, body, identity etc. and
- how socialization (household, per group) Religion, Education, Culture, Media influence formation of gender identities.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The gender is a concept which is distinguished from the biological concept of sex. Gender is constructed and expressed in many areas of social life.

Men and Women undeniably have certain physical differences. It is a subject of debate whether these biological differences also cause behavioural differences and whether biology, therefore is one of the causes of sex roles and gender-related social stratification. Biological determinism hold that biology does affect these things, but sociologists argue against the idea. For instance, from birth, a female child is received in a different way than is a male child. There are research studies which show that, the notion of women are inferior to men is stressed from the very moment a child is born. Later, it is supported by the behaviour patterns prescribed for girls and women. Hence gender discrimination and gender roles are to a large extent imposed by the society.

14.2 BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CONTROL

We now turn to the area of the body and its conceptualization.

14.2.1 Concept of Body

The body is, clearly a medium of culture. In the sense, we take care of our body and maintain it, eat, dress, and adorn ourselves, communicate with others, and so on. However, the body is not only a text of culture. It is also more directly, a 'locus of social control' so

that we are not what we want to be but are made through culture. This, is what Foucault calls the 'decile body' which is regulated by the norms of cultural life.

In the Indian context, an important work on the body in contemporary times is David Arnold's *Colonizing the Body*. He emphasizes the importance of 'the body as a site of colonizing power and of contestation between the colonized and the colonizers.

14.2.2 Sociological Understanding of Body

Anthropologists and sociologists have commented on the marked nature of woman's body by caste, religious belief, social norms and practices and on how woman's embodiment and her sexuality serve as important boundary markers. The female sexuality is controlled by caste and class factors is an indisputable fact. A woman's body and sexuality are in any case under the controlling purview of men. It is an assertion not only of patriarchal power but also of social control. Woman is allowed little or no space for an independent, self-perceived articulation, definition or expression of her sexuality. Her body becomes an instrument and a symbol for the community's expression of caste, class and communal honour. Chastity, virtue and above all, purity are extolled as great feminine virtues embodying the honour of the family, community and nation. In a sense, woman's body is often no longer her body but has been taken over by the community, of both men and women, to establish and legitimize its image in society.

To the extent that woman's body is the foundation on which gender equality is built, established and legitimized, understanding the female body in different contexts, settings, and situations is important.

14.2.3 Communicative Body

Only when we view the female body as communicative or lived body that we can begin to understand the implications of both the social construction of lived experience as well as women's own perceptions and articulations of their embodiment. The gender is inscribed on woman in everyday life both socially as well as through her life experiences, perceptions, desires, fantasies. It is in this sense that gender identity is truly both constructed and lived.

The internalization of representation of the female body by women appears to be fundamental to the formation of feminine identity.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How does the sociological concept of 'body' differ from that of the biological concept? Use about 8 lines for your answer.

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14.3 FACTORS LEADING TO GENDER IDENTITIES

Let us now see how socialization affects gender identities.

14.3.1 Socialization Process

Socialization, or the process of internalizing society's values in order to adapt to one's

culture, influences how people behave as males and females in society.

At one level, women menstruate, give birth, nurse babies, experience menopause-experiences which are unavailable to men. At another level, women and men are located in cultural settings that shape their experience of embodiment differently depending on class, ethnic, religious and caste factors. These socio-spatial and other historical factors are therefore equally important in the experience of embodiment in everyday life.

Socialization practices in different cultures reflect the care and concern that goes into the upbringing of girls so that they are infact trained to conduct themselves according to social norms, values and practices. Later, women absorb social expectations and infact experience them as their own, so that power, in a sense does not operate coercively but from within.

Sociologists realized that the process of socialization, by which people learn what is expected of them from their parents, peers, and society at large, teaches men and women the norms of conduct for their gender.

Gender Socialization

The social learning process that imbibes people (notably young) into understanding the various aspects of their culture includes the process of gender socialization. Gender socialization encompasses the process of learning society's gender roles and their advantages and limitations.

In most societies, there is a clear categorization of what it means to be male or female. This categorization process and the agents of socialization that transmit knowledge about gender roles influence how individuals define themselves and other in terms of gender and sex roles.

In many societies, gender roles i.e the expected or preferred ways for people of each sex to behave are rigidly defined. For instance, men have traditionally been expected to be strong; aggressive, even dominating. Similarly, the 'big boy's don't cry' typifies one aspect of the male role. Women have been expected to be nurturing, sensitive, emotional, and relatively passive. Children are taught these values, both consciously and unconsciously, from a very early age. Toys for example are also distinguished. Boys are given large sized, noise making or violent types whereas girls are often given what might be termed gentler toys. These expressions will influence formation of self as well identities.



Gender identities are formed from tender age

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

Agents of Gender Socialization

These include parents, siblings, peers, schools, society, religion and a variety of other institutions. For very young children, parents and family (including grand parents and other extended family members) play the central role in shaping gender socialization. They determine how the family interacts with a boy (this process is often unconscious) as well as the types of toys and clothes that the baby is given.

Gender identity itself is established by age two. Its central component is the notion "I am male" or "I am female". Sigmund Freud theorized that identification and imitation of same-sex parents leads to effective gender-identity formation. In the latency period described by Freud (ages seven to twelve), males and females tend to segregate themselves from each other. This may be considered part of the socialization process and further solidifies gender identification and role-specific behaviour. Schools and families continue to influence gender socialization throughout adolescence. During adolescence, peer influence becomes the strongest agent of gender socialization as teens form together in small social groups to facilitate their transition into adulthood and into the larger society. The socializing effects of the mass media also become powerful in teen years.

Gender identity and gender socialization can have serious ramifications for an individual's sense of self esteem.

14.3.2 Culture

Culture has traditionally been seen as of key significance in the construction of gender identity. Socialization theory has been very popular in its accounts of how boys and girls are treated differently from an early age and consequently grow up with different social-psychological characteristics. Education has been seen as an important part of this process, drawing boys and girls into different activities and achievements. The recent analysis of gender and culture has drawn heavily on literary theory, with the deconstructionism of Derrida and also on the discourse analysis of Michel Foucault. The emphasis has shifted from the individual's learning experience to the creation of the texts or representations or discourses which construct our notions of gender (Weedon). This work often speaks of difference, both between women and men, but also between women. Indeed some of the emphasis on differences between women has problematized the very concept of 'woman' as a unitary category.

In the Indian context, woman is defined as an ambivalent persona. Woman is located in myth and popular culture as both goddess and dangerous power (Shakti), as virtuous wife and dangerous evil, both pure and impure in her embodiment. Women were not only revered and worshipped but also controlled through a direct regulation of her sexuality.

14.3.3 Religion

In no society men and women experience religion in the same way. Religions are powerful social institutions that shape gender identities in society. There are sacred spaces where only men are allowed to enter and not women. Similarly, there are norms defined by which only men can perform certain duties or obligations pertaining to religious activities. Hence, religion not only defines how men and women participate in various religious activities but also reinforce and legitimize gender roles assigned to men and women in society.

14.3.4 Education

The formal education indoctrinates gender roles through which 'self' gradually gets shaped and influences gender identity. The numerous role models and examples portrayed in the schools, colleges and universities are the major sources of the formation of gender identities. The institution of education has been implied by sociologists in the process of gender socialization and the stereotyping of the genders.

14.3.5 Communication and Media

Most of our lives are in one way or another influenced by the imagery through communication and media. The visual and print media largely influences women's perceptions through the imaging of the female body as the 'perfect' or 'desirable' body. With the advent of television and the printed word in an increasingly modern urban India, the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through

14.4 LET US SUM UP

Woman in fact is socially constructed and the concept of gender becomes central to our understanding of the nature of women's embodiment in the everyday world. Gender and Identity is not something fixed and immutable. It is both constructed and lived, sometimes can also be transcended. It is therefore always in the making continuously in the process of communication and exchange, evolving through the everyday life experiences of women.

14.5 KEY WORDS

Gender	:	Sex refers to the biological attributes of men and women, while gender is understood to be a social construct incorporating the full range of personality traits, attitudes, feelings, values, behaviour and activities that society differentially ascribes to men and women.
Gender Identity	:	The knowledge of being biologically male or female; it is usually achieved by age two.
Gender Socialization	:	The adoption of gender roles through societal and parental expectations and the modeling of others in those roles.
Social Control	:	A term used very widely to refer to all types of forces and constraints which induce conformity to norms and customs in human society.
Socialization	:	The process of internalizing society's values in order to adapt to one's culture, influences how people behave as males and females in society.

14.6 FURTHER READINGS

Thapan, Meenakshi (ed.) 1997. *Embodiment-Essays on Gender and Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Maithreyi Krishnaraj and Karuna Chanana (ed.) 1989. *Gender and the Household Domain: Social and Cultural Dimensions*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Faith, Karlene (1994). Resistance: Lessons from Foucault and Feminism. In H. Lorraine Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.). *Power/Gender Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.

14.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Biological concept of body underlines the physical differences between men and women. Biological determinists argue that behavioral variation between men and women and subsequent definition of sex roles, are due to physical differences. However, sociological understanding of the concept of body is diametrically opposed with that of the biological concept. Sociologists argue that body is a medium of culture. The cultural norms of each society define and shape the concept of body and to a large extent the gender roles and gender related stratification.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) 5 (all)
- 2) 4 (2 years)
- 3) Both visual and print media are the major sources of gender biased and stereotype role models propagated thereby influencing the gender identities. The classic example is the imaging of the female body as the 'perfect' or 'desirable' body through various media including the powerful cable television and magazines.

UNIT 15 GENDER STATUS AND POWER

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Gender Inequality: Issues of Reproduction
 - 15.2.1 Motherhood
 - 15.2.2 Heredity
 - 15.2.3 Fertility Performance
- 15.3 Gender Inequality: Issues of Production
- 15.4 Role of Social Institutions
 - 15.4.1 Gender and Caste
 - 15.4.2 Gender and Religion
 - 15.4.3 Gender and Marriage Regulations
- 15.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.6. Key Words
- 15.7 Further Readings
- 15.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

15.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would help in the process of understanding:

- the nature of gender relations both in terms of production, and reproduction issues, and
- the role of social institutions in the equity issues.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

All over the world women are denied equal access with men to opportunities with men to opportunities for personal growth and social development in education, employment, marriage and the family, professional and political life. While women in India share many of their disabilities with women in the developed countries, their experience of discrimination is more extensive because of sex segregated character of society, the conditions of poverty and the traditional value system.

The understanding of the nature and bases of gender relations and the that of women's lives, their concerns, and perceptions necessarily entail a consideration of the dimension of power. In fact, the entire question of the status or position of women in a has often been viewed as hinging on the issue of how much power women as members of their sex have vis-à-vis men. Power has been interpreted in a variety of ways: it may refer to autonomy, influence, power to decide for others, ability to manipulate, institutionalized positions in the authority structure of a community, supernatural power to harm or bless others and so on.

There is nearly consensus among the scholars engaged in cross-cultural research on gender that central to the structure of women's decision making in any society is the structuring of production and reproduction in society, the details of which are discussed below:

15.2 GENDER INEQUALITY: ISSUES OF REPRODUCTION

We now turn to various issues of gender inequalities such as motherhood, heredity, fertility and so on.

15.2.1 Motherhood

Motherhood is the central fact of female existence because it is the most authentically biological experience that differentiates a woman from man. A woman's role in the reproduction of human beings far outweighs that of a man. It is invariably a woman who mothers. Motherhood and mothering are usually perceived as naturally related. This bringing forth of new life and its sustenance, so essential to human survival, paradoxically, become instruments of subordination. Maternal responsibility is used as an alibi to exclude a woman from power, authority, decision and a participatory role in public life. Further, motherhood and mothering are not controlled by her.

Glancing specifically at the situation of India women, Krishnaraj argues that what was, originally, a source of women's power, viz., her procreative role has rendered her powerless, that is specially subject to male domination. Perceived as a field in possession of the owner of seed (read semen), a woman's motherhood renders her specially susceptible to male control and domination. Deprived of minimum safety nets such as nourishment, safe birthing, adequate anti-natal care, child care facilities, motherhood renders working Indian women, specially in poor rural areas, extremely vulnerable. State sponsored incentives to motherhood both as ideology and material help are also questioned as patriarchal, denying women the ability to render motherhood as materially empowering.

15.2.2 Heredity

From ancient times the process of human reproduction in India has been conceived of in terms of male seed germinating in the female field. This can be seen in texts used during rituals of marriage and other crises of life many of which are of vedic origin, and the great epic of Mahabharata. The law books, particularly Manu Smriti, use it as the basis of determining the status of the offspring of mixed unions and for assessing the propriety of the types of mixed unions.

The conception of the process of human reproduction seems to have formed part of both the literate tradition and people's consciousness through the ages. Leela Dube argues that though medical science as expressed in Ayurveda recognised a woman's contribution to heredity, it was propagated in popular culture that the child carried the man's blood, as semen was believed to a product of his blood. In many matrilineal tribes, the superior reproductive role of a woman is recognised.

The underlying implications of the metaphor of conception as the seed sown in the soil are used for: biological symbolization of descent, to understand the nature of relations between the sexes and their relative rights and positions. Two things emerge from this. First, an essentially unequal relationship is reflected in an emphasised through the use of these symbols; and second, the symbolism is utilizing the culture to underplay the significance of women's contribution to biological reproduction. While tying her down to the supreme duty of motherhood, this symbolism is instrumental in denying her the natural right over her own children. Also in creating and sustaining an ideology in which strategic resources of both types – material as well as human remain in the hands of men.

15.2.2 Fertility Performance

Allowing for variations of behaviour across regions and between higher and lower caste, it is generally true that in India, a woman's sense of personal growth is related to her fertility performance and the social standing she achieves as a mother of sons. High fertility in sex segregated society affects the status of women in several ways. First, the birth of the first child at a very early age and repeated pregnancies combined with malnutrition leads to high maternal mortality and fetal wastage. Second, women are so completely tied down by child care, house work and agricultural labour that few options are open to them for their personal growth apart from their main role of wife-mother. Third, since such high value is attached to the reproductive function, formal education tends to be seen as irrelevant for girls who are destined for marriage and motherhood at an early age. This pattern of early marriage and the attitude to female education is largely responsible for the high female illiteracy rate.

15.3 GENDER INEQUALITY: ISSUES OF PRODUCTION

Man's rights over the woman do not relate only to her sexuality and reproductive capacity, but encompass her productive capacities and labour power also. Just as he is entitled to have control over her sexuality and over the product of her sexuality, he is entitled to have control over her labour and also the proceeds of her labour. The extent of her actual participation in the process of production does not decide the worth of her contribution for she is a dependent as far as the productive resources are concerned and works as a family labourer. She is perceived as a dependent in respect of shelter also, for it is the husband's right, both by law and custom, to establish a matrimonial home. The notion that man is the provider of shelter and staple food is firmly rooted in the minds of the people. It is not surprising therefore that a woman's role in cultivation and other over her earning for the she lives in her man's house and eats his produce even though all the while she also earns. This logic is applicable even where the woman is earning through wage labour. The non-recognition or gross under recognition of woman's contribution to economy is not unconnected with the patriarchal ideology being propagated through various methods.

Because of occupational segregation based on a sex-typed division of labour, high proportion of educated women are found in such female occupations as nursing, teaching and clerical work; less number of women seek career in engineering, technology and science, in politics and administration. There are several reasons why this pattern of occupational segregation and the exclusion for women from positions of executive authority and leadership are maintained. First, socialisation in the family and education in the school reinforce "gender roles", that is, cultural/definitions of the traits and behaviour that are considered appropriate for men and women. In school, girls are encouraged to aspire to a limited range of occupations which are believed to be "feminine" and compatible with the demands of their primary gender roles of housewife and mother.

Also, the increase in the number of women in the profession and the service sector has not lead to sexual equality in the distribution of occupational positions having power, status and privilege.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the key reproductive issues that affect gender relations in Indian society?

Use about 4 lines for your answer.

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- 2) What are the influencing factors for leading more women into occupations like nursing, teaching etc. Tick the right answer(s).

i) less work at home

ii) easier to get a job

iii) makes the household more viable economically

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- a) Socialisation b) Education c) Media d) Culture
- 1) only a
 - 2) only b
 - 3) only c
 - 4) only d
 - 5) all

15.4 ROLE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

We now examine gender relative to caste, religion and marriage.

M. N. Srinivas remarks: "It (the changing position of India women) has many facets and generalization is well nigh impossible because of the existence of considerable variation among regions, between rural and urban areas, among classes and finally among different religious ethnic and caste groups. Historian Romila Thapar also refers to the same predicament when she remarks: "within the India sub-continent there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural milieu. family, structure, class, caste, property rights and morals".

15.4.1 Gender and Caste

In order to properly assess the position of women in ancient society, a brief reference to stratificatory system as expressed through varna and caste system is necessary. Features like caste endogamy as mechanism of recruiting and retaining control over the labour and sexuality of women exist. Concepts of purity and pollution segregating groups and also regulating mobility of women are very crucial. Caste not only determines social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Certain tasks have to be performed by women while certain other tasks are meant for men. In agriculture, for instance, women can engaged themselves in water regulation, transplanting, weeding but not in ploughing. Also with upward mobility of the group, women are immediately withdrawn from the outside work. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But more subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women and through the ritual practices which day in and day out emphasised the dominant role of a woman as a faithful wife and devout mother.



Village women discuss matters of status and power

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

The linking of women and shudras together is one more evidence of the low position of women. Prescription and prohibitions for shudras and women were same on many occasions. The prohibition of the sacred thread ceremony for both women and shudras, similar punishment for killing a shudra or a woman, denial of religious privileges etc. are some of illustrations which indicate how caste and gender get entrenched.

15.4.2 Gender and Religion

In most of the religions, we find the great philosophical and theological teaching about the essential sameness of human nature, of the intrinsic worth of all human beings as everyone, woman just as much as man, is endowed with a soul, a divine spark, or is part of the same atman. This lofty ideal is often of very little practical consequence, however, in actual practice, much of the ethical teaching and the religious counsels reflect the social position of women in a particular environment. As a result, we also possess many sacred texts which relegate women's place to a lower or secondary rank to man. Such texts are frequently quoted as the spiritual basis for the legitimization of women's low status through the ages; they are the sacred authority which teaches that woman's status has to be low and unequal to that of man.

One important point in understanding the value structure in Indian society is the dual concept of the female in Hindu philosophy; on the one hand, woman is fertile, benevolent, bestower of prosperity; on the other hand she is considered aggressive, malevolent and destructive. This dual character manifests in the goddesses also, as there are dangerous, aggressive, malevolent goddesses like Kali and Durga; there are equally important goddesses like Laxmi, Saraswati, Mariamman who are benevolent. In short, the value structure by presenting the dual character of women seems to have been successful in creating a myth that India women possess power, may be not in visible terms. However, it is a very valuable concept in understanding the seemingly high and really inferior position of women in India. Hence, we have the paradoxical situation that in some religious teachings, an idealised exaltation of women in her role as mother and wife occurs; in some instances, an ideal of woman in her eternal essence is projected when in actual social life subjugation is woman's common lot.

Today, with an altogether different situation in society, the religions, are faced with an entirely new challenge. Since the social economic and political emancipation of women has become widely accepted, new pressures from the social environment are affecting all the religious traditions and the inadequacy of their traditional teaching regarding the general status or image of woman is being fundamentally questioned.

15.4.3 Gender and Marriage Regulations

The concept of anuloma and pratiloma marriage by definition denigrate women. A marriage where a boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste is approved and called anuloma, while marriage of women ritually pure groups with men of lower ritual status were considered pratiloma. Most serious punishments like excommunication and even death could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Physical mobility is also restricted through caste norms. The significant symbol of the low status of women in society is that the women of lower castes are accessible to men to higher status, while there is a very severe punishment for men of lower castes who dare to approach any women of higher groups.

Marriage at an early date, marriage within the caste and even in the subcaste, prohibition of pratiloma, marriage where a woman of higher caste marries a man of lower caste, marriage as a sacrament whereby a woman is bound in wedlock till she dies, were all practices which suggest the control of sexuality.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How did the institution of caste contribute to unjust gender relations in India? Use about 5 lines for your answer.

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

In order to have better understanding of the present social structure and position of women therein, it is imperative to know the operation of various factors and institutions moulding the society. Women's sexuality is the site of power, desire and the disavowal of desire. Sex discrimination is fundamentally unjust, and an offense against human dignity and an infringement of human rights. The status of women is therefore important from the viewpoint of both human rights and social justice and its implications for social progress and development.

15.6 KEY WORDS

- Gender** : Socially determined expectations for what it means to be male and the female. Gender is one element in a larger stratification system in which individuals and groups are ranked according to their access to valued resources in society.
- Gender Inequality** : Gender inequality refers to the distribution of resources within society by gender. This concept describes the relative advantages and disadvantages of men and women in society.
- Status** : Popularly employed as a synonym for prestige, but in sociological and anthropological usage, it can mean a position in a social structure. In role theory, the distinction between status and role is that between a social position and the behaviour expected of its incumbent.
- Power** : The ability to affect the behaviour of others, with or without their willingness to comply.

15.6 FURTHER READINGS

- Desai Neera and Maithreyi Krishnaraj (1987). *Women and Society in India*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications
- Dube Leela, Eleanor Leacock and Shirley Ardener (eds.) (1986). *Visibility and Power*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rajan Sunder Rajeshwar ed. (1999) *Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

15.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The key reproductive issues that affect gender relations are: motherhood, heredity and fertility performance. The procreative role which is a source of women's power paradoxically renders women powerless and subject to subordination. Similarly through conscious propagation of seed and earth (field) ideology, equal reproductive role of woman is denied in India society.
- 2) All

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Caste not only determined social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Caste system had clearly defined roles for both men and women. Through caste endogamy, it recruited and retained control over the labour and sexuality of women. The concepts like purity and pollution helped segregate groups and regulate mobility of women.

UNIT 16 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT :

SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Meaning and Definition
- 16.3 Reasons for Women's Powerlessness
- 16.4 Empowering Women
 - 16.4.1 Srilatha Batliwala's Study of Empowerment of Women in South Asia
 - 16.4.2 Sydney Schuler and Syed Hashemi's Study of Empowerment of Women in Rural Bangladesh
 - 16.4.3 Leslie Calman's Study of Women's Movement in India
- 16.5 Empowerment: Case Studies
 - 16.5.1 Case Study I: Proshika's Approach to Economic Empowerment of Women
 - 16.5.2 Protecting the Forests
 - 16.5.3 Empowering: Case Study II: Unionization of Tobacco Workers by SEWA
- 16.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.7 Key Words
- 16.8 Further Readings
- 16.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the meaning and definition of women's empowerment;
- elaborate reasons for women's powerlessness;
- discuss various approaches for empowering women; and
- give illustrations.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall discuss on "women's empowerment". It begins with the definition and meaning of the term "women's empowerment". Then the different reasons for women's powerlessness are discussed. The main reasons are patriarchy, and the focus on women's reproductive role. Thus women experience powerlessness in multiple social political and economic institutions. After that the various approaches for empowering women are discussed followed through illustrations where in women have been empowered by various women's organizations like SEWA and Proshika.

16.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION

The dictionary meaning of the terms "empowerment" is to give power or authority. Hence empowerment is the act of giving power. Thus women's empowerment is the act of empowering women i.e., to give them the power or authority. Empowerment is not necessarily only at the work place or at home. But in general it means the control which women have over all the resources. The term empowerment has different meanings to women of different classes. Any programme which aims to deal with empowerment of poor, and with women's empowerment in particular, must begin with an understanding of and the causes for the lack of power. It can only then development strategies on how to overcome these. While the logic behind this is clear, and the term "empowerment" is now in widespread use in development circles, it is still a relatively recent development concept

and remains relatively under defined. In the following sections we shall discuss the reason for the lack of power and then explain the strategies.

16.3 REASONS FOR WOMEN'S POWERLESSNESS

A central question that theorists interested in empowerment seek to answer is: What are the causes of subordination or oppression of a specific powerless group (e.g.) women)?

One approach to thinking about women's powerlessness focuses on patriarchy as an overarching gender (or kinship) system which determines women's roles and relationships. In a male dominated patriarchal society, women are viewed in their traditional social roles which are subordinate to men. If a woman wishes to be accepted as a woman she should not be too competent, over ambitious, dominating and devoid of femininity.

Another approach focuses on a single (or primary) domain of women's powerlessness, the most common being the household, giving rise to a focus on women's reproductive or productive roles respectively. (viz. the role of women as child bearers and housewives)

In Indian families girls are expected to assume responsibility for housework at a relatively early age. Even in ordinary circumstances the role expectation of girls is that they share the housekeeping chores like cooking and rearing of children along with mothers. Hence such societies assume that women are meant to work in the home and be totally dependent on the menfolk.

A third approach assumes that women experience sub-ordination or powerlessness in multiple domains (either simultaneously or sequentially). These include the home, at work, and all other places. At home a woman is expected to conform to the traditional ideal of a hard working woman ready to subjugate her own interests to the happiness of others in the family and demanding nothing in return. At the work place too, she must not be too competent in her job. If she wants to do her job to her satisfaction she faces the prospect of being resented. The reasons for this sub-ordination is that differences between a male and female child are made right from childhood and a girl is socialized to be submissive and passive.

The various approaches though distinct in many regards all assume that women experience powerlessness in (and through interaction of) multiple social, political and economic institutions (not just the household).

16.4 EMPOWERING WOMEN

The central challenge the practitioners interested in empowering women seeks to address is: how best to overcome or transform the causes of sub-ordination or oppression of women.

16.4.1 Srilatha Batliwala's Study of Empowerment of Women in South Asia

In her study on the empowerment of women in South Asia, Srilatha Batliwala distinguishes between three different non-government organizations (NGO) approaches. The integrated development approach, the economic approach and the consciousness raising cum research and resource agency approach – adopted by some NGOs which do not directly operate at the grass roots level.

According to Batliwala there are two types of empowerment

- a) Economic Empowerment
- b) Total Empowerment

The Government and various agencies feel that by providing various resources i.e. through integrated rural development programmes or entrepreneurial development programmes women can be empowered. But economic empowerment does not always lead to total empowerment or enhanced status. Some of the women belonging to affluent families may have the resources but have no decision making rights in their families and thus are not empowered. Thus lack of resources is not the causes of dis-empowerment but it is the result of dis-empowerment. The causes are historical factors like low status of women,

male dominated society etc. therefore only economic empowerment may not result in total empowerment i.e. a woman may become economically independent but still she may not have decision making power in her family and her husband or father may control the household.

As Batliwala also observes – the distinctions between these approaches can only be made conceptually. In practice, these distinctions often get blurred. Most development programmes combine some mix of these approaches. Under Batliwala's typology the experiences documented here would be classified as integrated rural development or economic approaches. However, all of them build upon an initial underlying base of consciousness – raising and organizing. And all of them explicitly or implicitly attribute women's disempowerment to multiple factors and not any single factor.

16.4.2 Sydney Schuler and Syed Hashemi's Study on Empowerment of Women in Rural Bangladesh

In their study on empowerment of women in rural Bangladesh, Sydney Schuler and Syed Hashemi focus on empowerment as experienced by women members of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Grameen Bank, both of which have been characterized as adopting individuals economic approaches. According to them there are six specific components to female empowerment in Bangladesh namely–

- 1) a sense of self and vision of a future
- 2) mobility and visibility
- 3) economic security
- 4) status and decision making power within the household
- 5) ability to interact effectively in the public sphere
- 6) participation in non-family groups

Among the examples of collective empowerment and action they report cases of women's groups taking action against the husbands of group members who beat or divorce their wives, or women groups fielding their own candidates and voting with their own minds in local elections.

Even these individuals economic approaches can have collective political effects.



Education of women is an important route to empowerment

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

16.4.3 Leslie Calman's Study of Women's Movement in India

Leslie Calman in her study of women's movement in India sees two major ideological and organizational tendencies within the movements.

- i) Large urban-based - which focuses on issues of rights and equality
- ii) Both rural and urban based which emphasizes empowerment and liberation.

According to Calman women's rights advocates, see women's concerns as issues of civil and political rights i.e. the aim for equality under the law. The women's empowerment advocates on the hand, see women's concerns as issues of economic and social rights i.e. the right to a livelihood and to determine one's future and aim at the personal and community empowerment of poor women.

The first step in organizing for empowerment is to get groups of women to analyse their common problems and then collectively to seek solutions. Under Calman's classification SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) is a leading example of an empowerment organization, even 'Proshika' would be classified as an empowerment organization by Calman.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Compare your answer with one at the end of the unit.

- 1) Say True or False
 - a) Women experience powerlessness only in economic institutions.
 - b) One approach to thinking about women's powerlessness focuses on patriarchy.
 - c) The term empowerment is a relatively development concept and is underdefined.
- 2) Fill in the Blanks:
 - a) studies women's movement in India
 - b) The main reasons for women's powerlessness are and the focus on women's role.
 - c) is a leading example of an empowerment organization under Calman's classification.

16.5 EMPOWERMENT: CASE STUDIES

We now turn to some case studies to illustrate our arguments in this unit.

16.5.1 Case Study I

Proshika's Approach to Economic Empowerment of Women

Proshika was one of the first organizations in Bangladesh to build organizations of the poor. Proshika views the empowerment of women as crucial to the development process in Bangladesh. National problems of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, low productivity and unemployment are directly linked with the denial of rights and opportunities to women. Women group members benefit from Proshika's training courses. Human development training courses are designed to enable women to understand and identify the problems they face as poor women and to develop strategies for tackling these problems. One objective of these courses is to empower women to raise their collective voices against practices such as dowry, wife battering, divorce under false grounds and unequal wages. Since poor women typically have had little opportunity to take leadership or management positions, the courses also enable women to acquire the skills necessary to take these positions in women's groups, and in their communities.

Proshika's views women's income generation is a starting point for women's empowerment. By making a contribution to family income, women begin to gain the power to make decisions within the family. With the ability to earn women gain the means for survival and self reliance. Proshika encourages women to undertake productive activities outside the home which help alter the gender division of labour and create opportunities for women to acquire new skills as well as to use new and higher technologies.

Proshika's approach to economic empowerment is well illustrated by growth and development of Jamuna and Lucky Mohila Samities.

16.5.2 Protecting the Forests

In Paikpara, forest depletion is a serious problem which has been perpetuated by the local elite who have been engaged in cutting and uprooting trees for profit. Most land in Paikpara is government reserved forest and administered by the local Forest Department and the actions of the elite have been unofficially sanctioned by some corrupt Forest Department staff.

From their personal experiences and through Proshika's training on environmental sustainability and regeneration, members of the Jamuna Mohila Samiti realised that depletion of the forest was not only a serious threat to the environment but also to their livelihoods. In their parents' lifetimes, many types of fruit bearing trees, vegetables and wild fowl were found in the forest. There was no longer such an abundance of wildlife, trees and plants and the forest mostly contained "Sal Trees". Women used the fallen branches and leaves of these trees for fuel but recognised that even this use of the forest was threatened by illegal tree felling. Not long after forming their group, the women decided to take action to protect the forests from further destruction.

In 1990, women members of Jamuna Mohila Samiti guarding the forest in shifts, despite the dishonour that inevitably follows women who challenge purdah and are publicly mobile and visible. Religious leaders, village elders and local government officials all opposed the women's presence in the forests and their open disregard for purdah and used means of intimidation to inhibit the women from continuing their actions. To some degree the grounds for this opposition were a pretext: the elite realised that they could no longer cut and uproot trees as easily and heedlessly as they had done before. They also recognised that the dependency of poor women on their wealthier neighbours had been eroded by the groups activities. Once the women began their group work, they less frequently needed to work as domestic labourers in the rich households because they had other income generating activities. Women group members no longer needed high interest loans from the rich moneylenders because they could get low interest credit from Proshika.

However, in the early period of women's forest protection activities, the village elite too had the opportunity to strike back. They cut the trees that had grown quite tall under the women's protection and battered some Paikpara women who confronted them. After this incident, Paikpara women and men alike, with residents from nearby villages, mobilized a signature campaign followed by a rally of about 2000 people, including journalists, to protest the forests' destruction. They made it clear that they would rather die than stop protecting the forests.

Although the elite convinced some local forest officials to register false cases against some Paikpara women and men, these cases were eventually withdrawn. The rally drove the women's point home and they faced fewer problems from the elite, as well as other interest groups, since then the women continue to maintain and protect the forest.

With the assistance of Proshika, women are in the process of negotiating benefit sharing with the government. They have proposed a scheme under which they (and other groups) would receive 40 percent of the profits from wood cut during forest maintenance. Since groups in the community will assist the Forest Department with this maintenance, they will have a further incentive to protect the forest. Although it has been a long and drawn out process, Proshika staff feel an agreement may be forthcoming. The women are also negotiating with the government for Khas land (Government state owned land) on which to build houses, since many Paikpara residents are landless.

16.5.3 Empowerment Case Study II

Empowering Marginalized Workers: Unionization of Tobacco workers by the Self-Employed Women's Association in Kheda, Gujarat.

This study focuses on the unionization process and the consequent economic and social change among female tobacco workers in Kheda District, Gujarat. The self employed Women's Association (SEWA) began its trade union activities in Kheda District in 1986 and has since become the major trade union in the district. Its total membership in the district at the end of 1994 was 14500. The main strength in SEWA's organization lies in

its ability to link up pure trade union activity of bargaining for higher wages with social security such as child care, health, savings, insurance with employment promotion measures, SEWA's efforts in Kheda District are a striking example of what women can achieve through combined actions leading to empowerment.

Kheda District is one of the richest districts in Gujarat state. However, it is also a district of great inequities. Alongside wealthy milk producers, cotton and tobacco growers and tobacco factory owners live impoverished and exploited workers who make up the majority of the district's population. Workers were supposed to receive Gujarat's agricultural minimum wage, but they would receive half the amount as they have no union to protect them. Women worked long hours beating tobacco leaves, feeding leaves into machines and packing tobacco into sacks. They conducted these tasks, which often involved lifting large quantities of tobacco, while breathing in a thick pallor of tobacco dust. Women suffered from respiratory problems, in addition to physical fatigue and back ailments from working in these harsh conditions.

Women from overwhelming majority of workers in the unorganized informal sector but most trade unions operating are gender neutral (not specific to women). SEWA however lays greater stress to women's problems through a wholistic approach. It regards women not only as an individual entity but as a member of composite family group. In Kheda these activities include organizing creches, saving groups, insurance, health, DWCRA groups etc.

Any other union first tries to enter a new area by framing charter of demands, registering a few members and placing demands before the employers. Such a strategy is justified for union created for economic gains.

SEWA on the other hand begins its activities by conducting a socio economic survey of the area. This survey is conducted to give the organizers an idea of the problems that women face. The next step is making them aware of these problems and their likely solutions. Women learning legal rights through worker's education programmes conducted by the organizers. These programmes aim to educate women so that they and not the organizers can decide on appropriate courses of action. Although this is a longer process than that adopted by most other trade unions, it attempts to initiate action from the workers themselves than depending on the outside.

When Indiraben (from Chikodera Village in Kheda) started conducting worker's education classes in the villages, she got very little response. The women were afraid that if they participated in the classes, their employers would find out and victimize them. Many of them were cynical of such efforts because they felt that even if they become aware of their rights, they could never confront their employers with their demands as they would lose their work. The women also lacked the confidence to face the landlords and factory owners. Thus low wages, low social status coupled with the fact they were women made them helpless and unorganized.

Earlier attempts by trade unions in unionizing tobacco workers were directed towards males. It therefore, became extremely difficult to attract women into trade unions.

Some of the women present did not get work. They had worked in a factory for several years, but seventeen of them lost their work because they had complained to the Labour Department that the factory workers were not given minimum wages. This had happened three years ago and they had remained unemployed since then. This incident had also scared the other workers.

SEWA initiated trade union activities on 1986 by conducting education classes. Women slowly became aware of her legal rights like minimum wages, time, etc. They exchanged views, discussed problems and realised the value of collective strength.

Under DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) the women formed groups and took up some income generating activity. SEWA encouraged them to start savings groups so that they did not have to depend on employers and thus overcome borrowing problems. SEWA's health scheme or the health worker's cooperatives created awareness of health and hygiene and provided cheap medicines. The strength of SEWA as a trade union lies in its ability to link up a number of support systems to back its trade union activities. SEWA also supported the women to arrange for finance and grants. The factory owners agreed to provide space for creche and the cooperative was registered on

21st December, 1994 under the name of Shri Saishav Mahila Bal Sewa Sahakari Mandal. One of the other support programmes in the collaboration with GIC in the insurance scheme for the poor. SEWA has been trying to improve opportunities for next generation viz. girls. The main point to note here is that women are now drawing strength from the collective. They now have a sense of confidence and can now sit on a chair rather than the floor.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Why does Proshika view women's income generation as a starting point for women's empowerment? Answer in about five lines.

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- 2) Why was it difficult to attract women into trade unions in Kheda? Answer in about five lines.

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16.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have defined the terms empowerment and also seen what women's empowerment mean. We have discussed various reasons for women's powerlessness and also the ways to overcome or transform the causes of sub-ordination or oppression of women. Lastly, we have discussed the case studies of women's organizations like Proshika and SEWA which have helped to empower women.

16.7 KEY WORDS

- Empowerment** : To give power or authority
- Patriarchal Society** : The society where in complete family authority resides in the husband or father of other male members.
- Mobility, Social** : The movement of an individual or group from one social class or social stratum to another.

16.8 FURTHER READINGS

Marilyn Carr, Martha Chen, Renana Jhabrala (ed.) 1996. *Speaking Out: Economic Empowerment of Women in South Asia*. New Delhi, Sage (India) Publications.

16.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) False
b) True
c) True
- 2) a) Leslie Calman
b) Patriarchy, reproductive
c) SEWA

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Proshika views women income generation as a starting point for women's empowerment because by making a contribution to family income, women begin to gain the power to make decisions within the family. She also gains the means for survival and self reliance. Productive activities outside the home help alter the gender division of labour and create opportunities for women to acquire new skills and to use new and higher technologies.
- 2) It was extremely difficult to attract women into trade unions because all the earlier attempts made by the trade unions in unionizing tobacco workers were directed towards males. Some the women who complained to the labour department that they were not given minimum wages had lost their jobs and remained unemployed since then. This incident scared the other workers.

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

16.7 KEY WORDS

Empowerment: To give power or authority to someone or something.
Patriarchal society: The society where in complete family authority resides in the husband or father of other male members of the society.Social Mobility: The movement of an individual or group from one social class or social status to another.

16.8 FURTHER READINGS

Manjiv, C. R. (ed). (1990). *Women's Empowerment: A New Paradigm for Development*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
ASAWES: A Women's Self-Help Group in India. The strength of SEWA as a women's movement lies in its ability to provide a platform for women to voice their concerns and to demand for change in the patriarchal system. The group has been successful in securing grants and support from various agencies. The group has also been successful in providing a platform for women to voice their concerns and to demand for change in the patriarchal system.