UNIT 29 STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Structure

29.0   OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have discussed the status of women in contemporary Indian society. After you have read this unit you should be able to

- explain the concept of **gender**, role and status in terms of the status of women in Indian society

- describe the status of women in contemporary India, and within the family in relation to household work

- describe women's status in the context of employment

- discuss the aspect of **gender role** stereotyping and its impact on women's health and education

- explain and exemplify the status of women in the media programme.

29.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the issues affecting the status of women in Indian society. Here, we have examined various aspects of women's status in contemporary Indian society in terms of their work, education, health and media images. This unit in brief will provide you the background for further discussion in the following units of this block. In the later units, we discuss in great detail gender issues relating to and important facets of women's movement, work, education, health and legal aspects.

This unit begins with a brief discussion on some of the key concepts of sociology viz. gender, role and status. These concepts have been examined here in terms of women's status in contemporary Indian society. In section 29.3, we examine the status of women in the family. Here we discuss the aspects of women's status in the context of lineage, rule of residence, and household chores. In the section on women and paid employment we discuss how women perceive themselves as workers and how traditional role expectations influence women's work. The employer's attitude towards women employees, and the traditional positions of authority in the rural and urban areas, which have been affecting the status of women in society, are also explained in this section. In section 29.4 and 29.5 of this unit we have discussed in good length the impact of gender role stereotyping on women's health and education.

In the section on women's health we discuss aspects of food discrimination, amniocentesis and sex discrimination and women's psychological responses towards these. In section on education we examine the educational status of women in terms of their performances and enrolment in various courses of study and gender biases in the textbooks. Lastly in Section 29.6 we present an overview of the status of women in media. Here we analyse a **case study** on the television programmes of Doordarshan. We also discuss briefly the changing facets of women's status in contemporary India.

29.2 RE-EXAMINING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

In this section we shall be examining the concepts of gender, role and status and the traditional view on women's role and status.

29.2.1 Gender

If you have already studied the units of Blocks 1, 2 and 3 of the first elective course of sociology for B.A. at IGNOU, you may wonder why we are going to look at such terms as role, status, function and even family and education once again. We are going to do so because it is now generally accepted that sociology and sociological theory have not paid adequate attention to the fact that societies are divided or stratified into not only on the basis of caste, class, religion and so on, but also on the basis of what we call "gender". The dictionary meaning of gender is "classification of objects roughly corresponding to the two sexes" as well as the properties of these two sexes. While discussing the differences between the sexes we generally focus on biological and reproductive functions, but differences in gender relate to various other

attributes, which may be socially and culturally determined. In other words sex is biological whereas gender is sociological, namely, the social meaning we attribute to it. Over here we shall be looking mainly at some of these attributes and how they come into existence. Further, we shall be looking at how the concepts of 'woman' and 'man' become important not only in terms of the difference between them, but also as concepts which help us better understand society and social relationships.

29.2.2 Role and Status

You are already aware of or will now realise the vital importance of the terms such as role, status and function for an understanding of society. These terms tell us how individuals and groups organise themselves as well as relate to each other. Very simply, role tells us about what is expected from an individual in a particular situation, while status deals with her or his expectations arising out of that situation. To put it another way, a role deals with duties and obligations while status deals with rights (but not necessarily legal rights). You will, of course, realise that these definitions or explanations are very simply put and may in fact overlook many complexities and even conflicts. For instance, it is commonly assumed that a mother is a woman, a wife, a cook, a teacher of her children, a daughter-in-law and so on. What happens when the mother is also the principal of the local village school? Not only does she have to deal with a range of roles and statuses, but also with the tensions that may arise out of her role as mother and her role as an administrator. We shall try and show you how conventional analyses have tended to concentrate on the traditional and accepted roles of women as bearers and rearers of children and not on their other roles. So far, biological differences have been focused on without adequate attention to the implications of these differences.

29.2.3 Traditional Expectations and Women's Role and Status

As a girl or boy living in contemporary India, you would have heard of, or even been witness to, caste and religious conflicts and wondered how these conflicts arise. In many cases they occur because of differences in expectations. You would perhaps also have heard of how a certain caste or community oppresses or ill-treats members of other castes and communities. Such matters are now routinely discussed in the school, within the home and among the friends. Occasionally there may also be cases of men of one group or caste molesting or raping women of another group or caste. Such matters are also discussed, but perhaps less freely. As in cases of other inter-caste and inter-community conflicts, blame is attached to one side or another. You might also hear some comments on how it was really the Chamar woman's fault: why was she walking by a deserted path late at night? Or if a large number of women have been molested you might also hear people justify this in terms of "the Chamars need to be kept in their place, and the only way to do so is to attack their women". In so doing their *izzat* or honour is threatened.

There may be some further discussion on how such situations arise. How often though, have you heard people say that the Chamar woman was walking home in the dark because she had to look for work in the neighbouring village so as to keep her children alive? Or that the scheduled caste women were molested because the men were too frightened or powerless to defend them?

If you have heard such arguments you would realise that these relate to expectations: women are assaulted because it is expected that they will not strike back. More importantly in attacking them higher caste men are fulfilling their expectations associated with their superior position. Caste oppression is a recognised expression of power and control of one group over another.

You are probably now quite confused by the manner in which terms, such as 'keeping people in their place', 'honour', 'conflict', 'power' and so on have been used. To make it simpler we are now suggesting that it is essential for us to take into consideration how the various roles and expectations of social groups may compete with one another. By giving you above the random examples of the tensions experienced by an individual woman and then of women from a group caught up in conflict situations we wanted to make you aware of the fact that a study of Indian society needs to take into consideration the role of gender to understand the concepts of role, status, and conflict.

29.3   WOMEN'S STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

In the following sections we shall be discussing various aspects of women's status in society in terms of some important indicators. The form and extent of work and political participation, levels of education, state of health, representation in decision making bodies, access to property etc. are some relevant indicators of status of the individual members in a society. However, not all members of a society have got equal access to the factors which constitute these indicators of status. Gender is one of the crucial dimensions behind this inequality. Hence, due to various socio-cultural factors the economic and political roles of women have remained mostly unrecognised. In our society they are marginalised and economically discriminated against.

Contemporary Indian society has been exposed to the broad processes of social transformation, agricultural modernisation and economic development, urbanisation and rapid industrialisation and globalisation. However, these processes have generated regional imbalances, sharpened class inequalities and augmented the gender disparities. Hence, women have become critical symbols of these growing imbalances. All these have affected adversely the various aspects of women's status in the contemporary Indian society. Within the limited scope of this unit we shall not be able to cover all aspects of women's status in our society. Hence, we shall concentrate only on the aspects of women's work, health and education, in this unit. Besides these we shall also present a case study on images of women as presented in popular media programmes. This will help you to analyse how media programmes reflect the status of women in Indian society.

29.3.1 The Family and Women's Work

It is not enough to say that any society consists of men and of women. It is equally important to look at how the two groups of people interact, as well as at the roles and expectations each group has of the other. Such roles and expectations are a product of the stereotypes of each gender. By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with a gender. These attributes arise out of the interaction of a complex set of factors, many

of which operate in the context of the family. We shall now see how these stereotypes come into existence.

i) Lineage, Residence and Women

Those of you who have read Block 2 of ESO-12 will be familiar with many of the terms being used here. Most families in India, irrespective of their caste and religion, are **patrilineal**. The exceptions are the matrilineal Nairs of Kerala and tribes like the Khasis of Meghalaya. Simply put, patrilineality implies descent and inheritance through the male line. It also usually implies patrilocality or living of the husband in his father's home, quite often with his father, brother or brothers and their wives and children. This is also a simplified definition of a joint family. Under patrilocality a wife's visits to her natal home are usually restricted to ritual occasions, and a child is socialised mainly according to the values of the father's family. Even though a mother has a vital part to play in the child's life, major decisions regarding his/her future and that of others in the family are taken by the men in the family.

ii) Gender Role Stereotyping and Household Chores

Thus the first idea on gender role differences which a child acquires is that of women of one's family marrying and leaving their homes to live with different groups of people. Secondly, men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision-making and are far more visible and audible than their wives. Third, most of the tasks within the home are done by the mother, grand- mother,
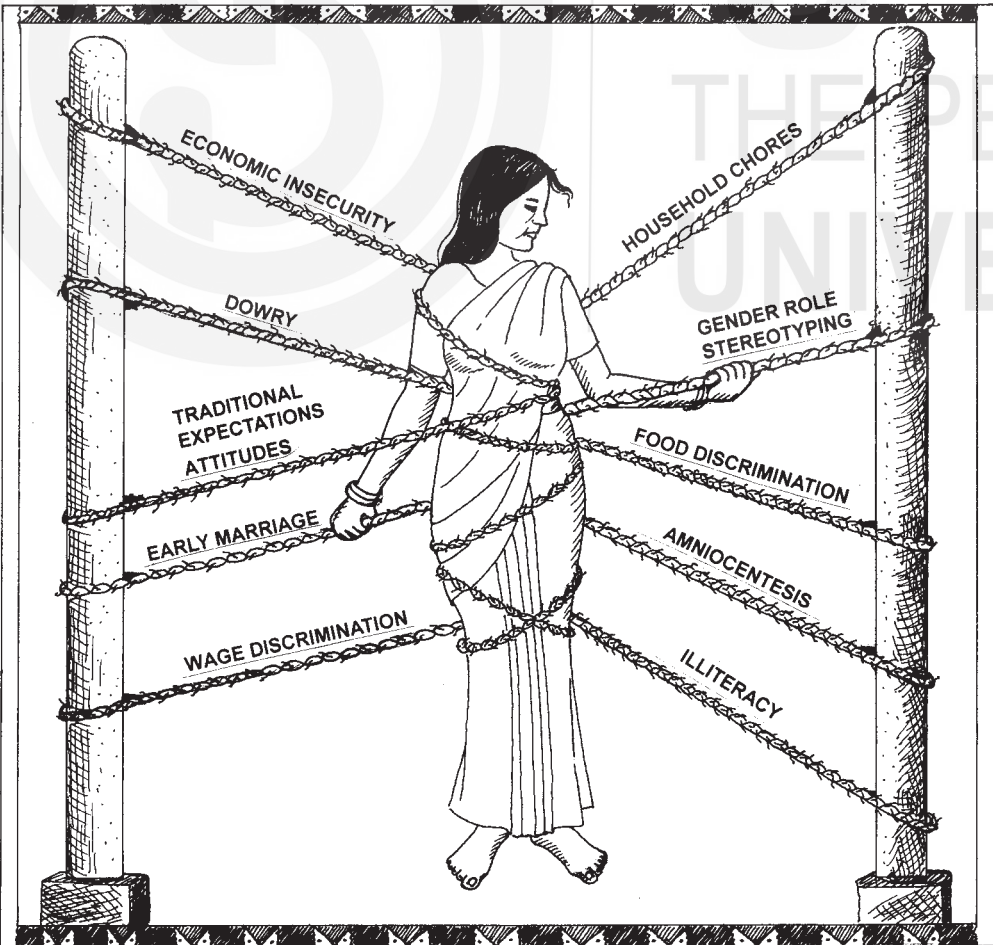

Figure 29.1 Status of women in India

sisters and so on. At meal times, they carry food to the fields for the men. All these tasks which consume time and energy are not counted as 'work' or 'employment' and there is no payment involved. In Western countries, women's groups, politicians and other concerned individuals have been arguing for payment for housework and childcare. In India the question of payment for household jobs has not really been an important issue or demand. As we shall see, there are many other issues, which require urgent attention. At the same time, it is important for us to remember that non-payment should not also mean non-recognition. The fact that women are expected to perform all these tasks as a part of their conventional roles and no special merit is awarded to them for these tiring and tiresome jobs. In fact, you are all familiar with stories of how Meena's bad cooking resulted in her mother-in-law's continued stomach ailments or criticism of Rashmi's job as a teacher which left her little time to knit the usual number of sweaters for her family members. Figure 29.1 shows different concerns that determine the status of women in India.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   What are the major attributes of gender differences? Use three lines for your answer.

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ii)   What do you mean by gender stereotype? Use three lines for your answer.

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iii)   Give an example of gender role differences in two lines.

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29.3.2 Women and Paid Employment

Not only is women's productive work within the house unpaid, but also it often is not understood how multiplicity of roles may result in conflict in their performance. Let us discuss the issue of women's work participation and grasp the nature of complexities regarding their work.

i)   **Women's Work Participation**

As per to 1981 figures, 19.7 percent of Indian women were recorded as paid workers, of whom over 87 per cent were in the unorganised or informal sector of the economy. The work participation rate of women in 1991 and 2001 was 22.3 and 25.7 percent, respectively. The increase in the work participation of women during the decade 1991-2001 is mainly due to the increase in the proportion of marginal workers (6.3 percent to 11 percent) in the total female work force. The proportion of the main workers, in fact, decreased from 15.9 percent to 14.7 percent. It is held by many observers of Indian economy that

without women's paid or unpaid labour the Indian agricultural economy would not be able to function. In the informal sector, there is no legal redressal for problems; no maternity or other leave benefits and little security of service. Working long hours as domestic servants, stitching clothes for the garment export industry, working on the assembly line of small electronics manufacturing units or the beedi, tobacco, cashewnut factories, women live in fear of retrenchment, exploitation (often of a sexual nature) and inadequate wages.

What is particularly important here is that repeated under-representation of women's work in census and other statistical exercises is a reflection of a combination of factors. Women's work participation and their status as workers have been affected by various factors. Some of the important ones are women's self-perception, employers' attitude to women employees, traditional positions of authority in the rural and urban areas, and traditional role expectations. In the following sub-sections we shall be discussing a few important aspects of these factors.

ii) Women's Self-perception

Let us look at how women perceive themselves as workers. Once in a job how a woman relates to it depends on her primary **socialisation**. If, as is the case with most, she has internalised the dominance of the homemaker role, she is likely to adopt a non-competitive, uninvolved and low profile at work. She is committed to the value system, which stresses that her energies and motivations are to be directed to making a success of her home and not her job. Interestingly, this is true of women in highly skilled occupations as well. In her study of women scientists, Maithreyi Krishna Raj (1978) found that though women were concerned about continuing their jobs, they were not looking for better prospects nor have they 'begun with a long range career strategy'. Once in a job, women rarely attempted to acquire further qualifications, which would help in promotions. In fact, their attitude towards promotions was by no means clear-cut. T.S. Papola's (1982) study of working women, which covered a range from those in supervisory posts in industrial establishments to unskilled workers in Lucknow city, showed that women were more different than men in respect of their promotion prospects. They felt insecure about their qualifications, personal attributes and ability to pass requisite in-service examinations. A small though significant proportion said that if promotions involved transfers outside the city or giving more time to the job, they would not be in a position to apply.

Apart from not applying for promotions because it would conflict with one's family commitment, some women do not even enter the profession for which they have been trained. For instance, according to the 1971 census, 7.1 per cent of doctors were women, though the number of women actually qualified was about 25 per hundred. While some may have migrated to other countries or been temporarily unemployed for a variety of reasons, the likelihood of voluntary abstention from the profession of their choice cannot be ruled out. It is not improbable that a work environment which involves interacting with male colleagues and patients in a variety of situations as well as being on night duty would deter parents and conjugal families from allowing women to practice as doctors. The requirement of rural service for government doctors is another factor, which deters families as well as the women themselves.

iii) **Employers' Attitude**

Familial proscriptions and women's own apprehensions are not uncommonly exploited by employers. Papola's (1982) study showed that women were discriminated against at the time of promotions and tended to be crowded into lower status clerical and primary school jobs. They were rarely promoted to executive and supervisory posts. Among skilled and unskilled workers, the reasons put forth for preferring men were their greater physical strength and lower rate of absenteeism. As regards employment and promotion to supervisory and clerical categories, male employers defended themselves by pointing out that women did not come forth to be recruited or promoted. When questioned further, over half the employers said that in any case a woman's primary responsibility was to her home, and with a high male unemployment rate, women who were often secondary earners, should not be given preference over men.

iv) **Traditional Positions of Authority in Rural Areas**

Where the ownership of land, means of production as well as decision-making are dominated by men, the division of labour within the family as well as in the employment market is weighted in favour of those in positions or authority. Case studies show that even when men are not the chief breadwinners, women, steeped in a tradition which reveres men as the *annadatas* (bread givers), rarely speak of themselves as the heads of households or those who can make major family decisions. In her in-depth study of five working class women in Kerala, Leela Gulati (1981) concluded that though in three families women were the principal earners, employment did not improve the women's self-estimation or status in the social hierarchy. Notions of female dependency and inferiority are carried over to areas where in fact, men have to rely on their wives' skills for survival. In Narasapur (Andhra Pradesh) where women make fine lace, the menfolk took the produce to distant areas to sell. Women spoke of their dependence on men, but did not point out that without their skills, husbands may well be unemployed if not destitute. They were characteristically modest about their role in productive labour. Though women were aware that their work was quite distinct from housework and was by no means a leisure time activity, they did not attach much importance to their economic roles.

v) **Traditional Positions of Authority in Urban Areas**

In the urban areas, the working class, and men in particular have a wider range of job options available to them. The study by Leela Kasturi (1990) shows that when unemployed weavers from Tamil Nadu migrated to Delhi, the womenfolk found jobs only as domestic servants, while men became mechanics, cooks or drivers. The shift in residence meant a severance with an established way of life and the support of the extended family. Men who had few options at home became more whimsical and choosy about jobs in the metropolitan city. Women could hardly take anytime off from work to look around for alternatives; yet, men as well as women regard the unpaid and paid work of men as supportive and women's earning as supplementary. In a study of sweeper women of Delhi it was found that women supported unemployed husbands unquestioningly and even put up with physical abuse from them. The husbands were the *maliks* or masters, entitled to such services (*seva*) as massage of the legs and feet. Govind Kelkar (1981) found that women had to

perform such services after full day's work in the areas of Green Revolution in Punjab. Female 'misdemeanours' such as answering back, serving food which was regarded as unpalatable or occasionally exchanging information on family matters were punished with beatings.

A study of the sweeper community in Delhi by Malavika Karlekar (1987) shows that husbands were moving out of the traditional occupation and women actively supported male attempts at getting better jobs in the urban environment. Women appeared convinced that men had a right to better lives, while they rarely had such thoughts for themselves. Restricted physical mobility, full responsibility for housework as well as fairly rigid views on where women from certain castes should work led women automatically to a situation where it was assumed that occupational mobility was meant for men only. Not unexpectedly, most daughters after the age of eight years or so joined their mothers at work or cooked and cleaned at home. Boys rarely helped, and it was not unusual to see sons playing in the alleys while their younger sisters were at work, either at home or with their mothers.

vi) **Working Conditions**

For the majority of working class women, a job is essential. In relation to the men they have fewer choices as well as limited chances for occupational mobility. When men and women work in the same occupation, female tasks are often the more arduous and time-consuming. For instance, in paddy cultivation they spend long hours in sowing, weeding and transplanting. In Kerala the extraction of the cashew seed from a corrosive liquid is women's work. Again, when both sexes do identical jobs, women often get paid less than men. Protests are rare, apart from ignorance of legal and other rights; there is a fear of exploitation and sexual harassment by the landlord or contractor.

Activity 1

If you are living in a nuclear family, describe in about 10-15 sentences a day in the life of all your family members and state approximately how much time they spend on household chores and employment activities within and outside the home. Before doing so, identify each family memeber by age, sex and relationship to you. If you live in a joint family, describe the same as above for only the female members of the family. Compare, if possible, your note with the notes of other learners at your Study Centre.

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vii) **Traditional Role Expectations**

Irrespective of social class there is, at the level of belief, widespread commitment to the notion that a woman's job must not interfere or compete with her primary role of wife and mother. There is also concern with her physical safety and the respectability of the occupation. Clearly, working class families are far less able to ensure these conditions, and often their women work under very difficult circumstances. Highly rated occupations for middle class women are teaching jobs at various levels, librarianship, medicine, particularly with specialisation in gynaecology and paediatrics, health visitorships and so on. However, as the availability of jobs is dependent on the market situation, as well as on access to higher education, many women have to be content with being telephone operators, clerks, typists and nurses.

As you are reading these pages, you may well think back on your own life experiences: how often have you heard your father or your brother discuss their work and work related issues and problems? And how often have your mother, wife and sister, irrespective of whether they are housewives or school teachers, clerical workers or college teachers, talked about tensions in running the house, arguments with their bosses on a matter of principle or about how they enjoyed teaching the parts of a flower in a different way? If you reflect on the matter, you will probably find that men talk and express more in the home environment on their work-related lives, women tend to discuss marriage negotiations, incidents with other relatives, the price of kerosene and so on much more with family member. What is involved is a question of perceptions, which is vital for an understanding of how individuals view their roles. Women, much more than men, irrespective of their multiplicity of roles, tend to internalise the view of home-maker and nurturant provider. This self-perception is more acute in a patrilineal system where official authority figures are men.

Check Your Progress 2

Select the correct answer to the following questions.

i)   According to the 2001 census the female work participation rate is

    a)   25.7 percent

    b)   22.5 percent

    c)   39.3 percent

    d)   15.9 percent.

ii) Studies show that if a woman has internalised the dominance of home makers role she is likely to adopt a

    a)   competitive, involved and high profile at work

    b)   non-competitive, uninvolved and low profile at work

    c)   both of the above

    d)   none of the above.

29.4   ROLE STEREOTYPING: IMPACT ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

We have spent quite some time discussing work either for a wage or otherwise primarily because it both describes as well as defines an individual woman's position in her family and in society. We concluded that the patrilineal family was largely responsible for the formation of such images. At the same time, there are agencies and agents outside the family, which help in the formation of stereotypes. It is important to know how women react to their situation. The following sub-sections discuss food discrimination in the family, amniocentesis and sex discrimination within the given definitions of roles and expectations. These show how women's mental and physical health is affected by such definitions of roles and expectations.

29.4.1 Food Discrimination

As you have seen, women work long and tedious hours, often under difficult and unhygienic conditions. A number of studies have also documented how in a scarcity situation, women and girls suffer as a result of food discrimination. By this we mean that men and boys eat first, and are given the larger and more nutritious portions. Traditionally, women eat after men in our society, and when there is limited food to be distributed, they automatically get less.

What is important here is that food discrimination is not only a function of poverty and scarcity, but also of perceptions and expectations. It is assumed that men need better and more food because they work hard and are the bread winners. The fact that women may work as hard and earn as much is rarely taken into consideration. Certainly the labour and energy they expend in household-related tasks are rarely taken note of. These perceptions are a part of a system where little value is attached to female life.

29.4.2 Amniocentesis and Sex Discrimination

You have probably heard of amniocentesis or the process by which the amniotic fluid is extracted from a pregnant woman to determine the health of the foetus or unborn child. Some birth-related defects are more common in girls and others in boys. Thus, the process of the test involves determining the sex of the child so as to establish the presence or otherwise of some or other defects. The aim of the test is not to ascertain the sex of the child, though it is now being misused for pre-birth sex determination. In 1985, a study of the Greater Mumbai area showed that there had been 40,000 abortions of female foetuses following amniocentesis. Most women who go in for the tests leading to abortion of the female foetus are from middle class homes, and may even have college education.

The misuse of this test has now resulted in banning of this test in India. What is important here is to understand and make the distinction between a test conducted only for medical reasons and one, which is used to destroy a healthy female foetus. It is the latter situation with which we are concerned. Why is an unborn baby girl less valued than a male child? This is not an easy question to answer particularly when you have seen how much work a woman does. In part we can answer this question by looking at roles, expectations and obligations. We can say that certain obligations, namely that of a daughter to be educated, clothed and married with a dowry, outweigh expectations arising out of her role as a contributor to the household in a variety of ways. You may say that the question of contribution did not really occur in the case of the urban middle class, among whom amniocentesis became so common.

Here one could perhaps argue that the considerations of dowry to be paid is the most important factor. Secondly, it is possible that with the rising cost of living and increasing expectations, the small family norm is becoming more popular among those who had earlier large families. Here, in cases of accidental pregnancy, abortion following amniocentesis may have been practised, particularly if the foetus was that of a female. The argument of course remains the same: a girl is less wanted than a boy. It can be hypothesised that irrespective of the sex of the first child, it was unlikely that the second foetus, if it was that of a boy, was aborted, even if the parents want only two children, and that too, preferably one of each sex. On the other hand, a female foetus was likely

to be aborted more readily. In a study conducted among the Kallar caste of Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, female infanticide had become a way of resolving the burden of dowry on poor families. Hospital records showed that mothers who had given birth to daughters ran away from their hospital beds in large numbers with newborn infants. Follow-up enquiries by the hospital staff showed that the babies were killed by women desperate to survive themselves. In the year 1997, data on female infant death due to 'social cause' an euphemism for female infanticide from the primary health centre (PHC) records showed that on an average around 3000 cases of female infanticide occur in a year in Tamil Nadu. This accounts for one-sixth to one-fifth of all female infant deaths in the state (Venkatesh, 2000). A daughter is unwanted, as she would mean long-term problems for her poverty stricken parents.

29.4.3 Women's Psychological Response

It is not as though there is no reaction from girls and women to their deteriorating position. The incidence of a range of physical ailments, neurotic disorders and spirit possession are manifestations of how women react, at one level, to their situation. The unit on women's movement will show you how this growing resentment if not anger has been channellised into effective action. Nonetheless, individual woman's response is very important, particularly as it tells us something about the inner workings of a human mind.

a) **Accumulated and Repressed Rage: Psychoanalysis**

On the basis of case studies, particularly of rural women, psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar (1983) was struck by their accumulated and repressed rage, the helpless anger of young women, and their lack of social emancipation being the canvas on which the individual picture of hysterical illness is painted. In the Indian context, hysteria takes the form of possession by ghosts of forbidden sexual and aggressive wishes. Families become actively involved in ridding girls of these malevolent spirits, often through trips to shamans, gurus and *matas*. At the same time, psychiatrists have pointed out that urban middle class families tend to respond more quickly to the obvious maladjustments of male children: underachieving at school, tantrums and depression at home result in trips to remedial clinics in hospitals. Girls either do not express themselves (that is, they repress their resentment and unhappiness) or even if they do, families tend to take more notice of boys' problems than those of girls. After a certain point, internalised unhappiness manifests itself in more concrete forms. It is not being suggested that women sham illness or even possession states in order to gain attention. What is being suggested, however, is that at the level of the unconscious, a sense of social marginalisation and anguish leads to an obsession with the self either at the psychic and physical level or at both. This compensation by the individual for collective neglect often leads to illness of various forms.

b) *Maibis* **and Polygyny Among Meitei**

Interestingly, among the Meitei of Manipur where women enjoy considerable freedom in choosing their marriage partners as well as economic autonomy and control in the area of weaving, an important source of income for entire families, the percentage of women shamans or *maibis* is high. Who become *maibis*? Surely not all independent-minded women, though according to a Meitei proverb, 'stubborn women are destined to become *maibis*'. In a society

where men define social reality, a stubborn woman is perhaps one who is not sufficiently deferential to the man's point of view. While spirit possession among women is accepted in some societies as an institutionalised form of female rebelliousness, it does not help in improving women's general status. Rather, it leads, as in the present case, to labelling women who differ as potential maibis. Or it may also result in the resurgence of certain other practices aimed at subjugating women. For instance, among the Meitei, polygyny in the urban areas is on the increase. The right of one man to claim control over the sexuality as well as the economic potential of more than one woman is of considerable significance in a society where female independence has been traditionally valued. While the author records a growing number of *Kainabas* or divorces instituted by women, Chaki Sircar (1984) has documented the suffering of those who were forced into a situation of competing with co-wives.

It is now time for us to look at how institutions outside the family work to create or to reduce inequalities between women and men. In the following sections we shall look at education, and then briefly at the media.

29.5 ROLE STEREOTYPING IN THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIALISATION PROCESSES

You are perhaps aware that many more Indian boys than girls are enrolled in schools, and finish their education up to certain levels. Looking around you will see girls helping their mothers at home, going out to work, or taking care of their younger brothers and sisters. Such situations are discussed at length in the unit on education (unit 10, Block 1 of the first elective course of sociology for B.A. at IGNOU).

What we shall look at here is how the educational system itself perpetuates stereotypes and creates new ones. We are using the term educational system to include what is taught in class, namely the syllabus, attitude of teachers and school and college administrators and the views put forth in textbooks. At the level of policy, there has been a certain degree of confusion regarding the right kind of education for girls. What are the views of those who argue for more home science colleges for girls and computer courses for boys?

29.5.1 Gender Differentiation in Courses of Study

Are girls not capable of becoming neurosurgeons, engineers, nuclear scientists, and so on? A look at the school (Class XII) results for 1985 shows that girls secured a higher pass percentage than boys in all the four groups namely science, humanities, commerce and vocational studies. Of the 6,644 students who offered science, 4,852 or 73 per cent were boys while of the 26,716 appearing in the humanities group, 59 per cent were girls. The commerce group was evenly divided between boys and girls. Interestingly, though a fewer number of girls were in the science group, their pass percentage was as high as 83.8 per cent as against 70.7 per cent for the boys. The all India figures of girls' enrolment in higher education in science was 40 per cent of all those in college while only 4 per cent were studying engineering or technology.

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Medicine, which gained early respectability as a profession suitable for women, accounted for a ratio of one girl to every three boy students.

i)   Factors Influencing the Choice of Subjects

There are certain tentative conclusions to be drawn on the basis of the empirical data given above. On the whole, arts subjects are more attractive to students irrespective of sex. More boys than girls study science and engineering and girls are clustered in lower status courses and institutions. However, most importantly, these figures are not a true reflection of actual ability. The fact that science, technology and engineering education is unequally distributed among the sexes does not necessarily represent differences in aptitudes. The streaming which takes place at the relatively early age of 16 years is not based only on academic factors. Conversations with principals and teachers of leading schools in Delhi indicate that often bright girls opt out of the science stream for reasons which have no connection with their academic performance. Classroom behaviour may also provide some clues on what factors influence the choices and attitudes of girls. While doing practice teaching in some of the capital's important schools/student-teachers not only found a sharp drop in the numbers of girls studying science at the Plus-Two level, but also that their class participation was substantially different from that of boys. Those who taught classes IV and VII found that girls were as assertive and definite in their points of view as their male peers. At the higher levels, they became quiet and reserve non-participants, though they were diligent with their homework and performed well in unit tests. Outside class too, older girls tended to wander around in groups by themselves while boys could be heard shouting lustily on the playing fields.

ii)   Choice of Subjects and Professional Mobility

A principal commented that most of the girls who took up science hoped to enter medical colleges. Of those who were not successful, the majority went into home science, biochemistry or switched to arts subjects. Very few aspired to be engineers, research scientists or geophysicists. Studies of girls who do become scientists and professionals in competitive areas indicate a lower degree of job involvement and concentration in the lower echelons of service. One reason for this, of course, is that women do not remain long enough in a profession or job to be eligible for promotions. Often, familial reasons such as marriage, limited physical mobility due to the nature of husband's employment, reluctance to spend more time at work as it would mean compromising with responsibilities at home and so on are responsible for well-demarcated hours of work and degrees of participation. Role conflict is minimised by a socialisation process, which stresses the primacy of home-oriented duties. Girls are trained to be good housewives early as participation in culinary and other activities is actively encouraged and applauded by family members.

29.5.2 Biases in Textbooks

There have been a number of studies on the content of text books which suggest that boys are invariably depicted as out-going, adventurous, brave and helpful; girls on the other hand are shown as dependent, submissive, quiet and obedient. At the same time, girls are expected to study and to perform well, however, they are not to be excessively competitive or demand too much freedom of thought and expression.

29.5.3 Differentiation in the Socialisation Process

Educationist Krishna Kumar's (1986) experiences of "growing up male" are amply substantiated by Leela Dube (1988) and psycho-analyst Sudhir Kakar's (1983) studies of male and female socialisation in India. Thus, watching girls heading straight home in "silent cluster" from school led Kumar to believe that "girls are not individuals". As boys, he and his peers were free to spend time on the way, experiment with their cycles and watch the world go by. Such joys are rarely available to a large section of middle class girls. Bar those girls in the villages who have to earn a living, or help at home and do odd jobs of fetching and carrying, restrictions on movement are not so severe. If you live in a village you will observe that a girl can, until puberty, be allowed to move about quite freely in public places. You would perhaps think that she could be spending that time in school. If you are an urban dweller, you will be familiar with discussions at home, or perhaps on the radio and television, of how difficult it is for parents to allow their daughters to stay back after school hours, to participate in extra-curricular activities. Parents and guardians are constantly bothered with their safety on public buses; and, in any case, there is always the question of relations and friends who want to know why it is necessary for Rani to play basket ball or learn music after school hours. That is the time when she is expected at home, to participate in a variety of household chores. Such questions, however, are less often raised in case of her brother, Ravi, who is always late in coming home from college. A part of stereotyping process assumes that boys, more than girls, have a right to more independence and self-expression. Expectations and obligations are more rigid in the case of girls, and their rights are accordingly fewer.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   Why does food discrimination exist in the family? Answer in five lines.

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ii) What are the reasons behind low degree of job involvement and concentration in the lower echelons of service of the women scientists and professionals? Give your answer in about six lines.

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29.6 MEDIA, WOMEN AND THE CHANGING SCENARIO

Listening to radio programmes and watching the television and reading the newspaper reports you may feel that issues, relating to women are now receiving more attention. Whether it is a horrifying description, of a 'dowry death' or of atrocities against a scheduled caste or tribal woman, of more girls going to school each year, there seems to exist more information of what we can call gender issues. At the same time the media through advertisements, television serials and other programmes continue to portray women as either weak, defenseless creatures, or as bewitching maidens, out to win the hearts of unsuspecting young men. Anything ranging from a motorcycle to a soap is advertised with an appealing woman model inviting us to buy the particular item.

29.6.1 Women as Projected on Television

There has been gender bias in the television programmes. Over here we shall look briefly at the findings of a report on how stereotypes are formed and perpetuated in Indian television programmes. The study conducted by Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe (1990) was based on intensive viewing of all Delhi Doordarshan programmes on alternate dates of the month of July 1986. Thus every programme became a part of the sample which was classified in seven broad areas. We shall look briefly at some of the important findings of their study.

Men appeared as 'newsmaker' in 77.4 per cent of the cases while women were in that role in only 6.5 per cent cases and for the rest, a categorical analysis was not possible. The authors pointed out that when reporting on politicians, women appeared in the political news as wives, mothers and daughters of well-known leaders. They appeared as victims of calamities and as members of audiences. In areas where curfew was imposed, women were shown as shoppers when curfew was relaxed. With the emphasis on developmental programmes, the official media did give some coverage to women working in agriculture, sericulture, tea gardens and so on.

29.6.2 Biased Representation of Women in the T V Serials and Cinema

In their analysis of serials and cinema, the authors observed that men characters were almost double that of women characters. In terms of occupation women appeared mainly as housewives. If employed, they were invariably school teachers, office workers and flight attendants. By and large, women are depicted as dependent, submissive and sacrificing, whereas men are self-confident, dominant, ambitious and even ruthless. Krishnan and Dighe conclude that "women are underrepresented in general, marriage and parenthood are considered more important to women than to men" and female-dominated occupations are played up. The authors also point out that television programmes have distorted the women's movement and its role.

29.6.3 Changing Scenario

We need to remember that since the 1980s there has been some resistance to the stereotypes formed of women. Secondly, certain laws as well as legal

judgments have worked towards greater gender equality. Textbook reforms, agitations against the portrayal of women in the media and moves to involve more women in the political process at various levels and so on are all part of a new phase of awareness in Indian society. This has led to resurgence of women's movement in various parts of the country in recent years. We shall discuss these aspects in detail in the next unit (unit 30). The consciousness has not only made all of us more sensitive to the situation of half the country's population but has also generated a lot of data, studies and reports on relevant issues. It has led to the development of **Women's Studies** as an area of academic research and teaching, which acts as an essential input in correcting our biases in knowledge. It can also be hoped that this new knowledge will help to correct stereotyping of women and their role and therefore carry positive impact on status. We shall discuss these aspects in greater detail in unit 30.

Activity 2

Remember the plot of a story in a book, or a television programme or serial you have read or viewed in the last month. How many male and female characters appeared in it and what were their roles. Describe these in about fifteen sentences. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co- learners in the Study Centre.

29.7   LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the meaning of role, status and expectation in the context of women's status in contemporary Indian society. We have analysed the status of women in family and work place. We have also examined how women's perceptions of work, employer's attitude, traditional positions of authority and role expectations have affected women's employment in our society. The aspects of women's role stereotyping and their impact on women's health and education have also been analysed in this unit. Lastly, we have examined the status of women in media programmes with special reference to the television programmes presented on Doordarshan.

29.8   KEY WORDS

Case Study	In-depth enquiry of a case or subject. It is a research approach that involves thorough analysis of a single case.
Gender	Humans are divided into two sexes or two genders - male and female. While sexual differences are biologically determined, gender differences are culturally constructed. A woman is not only a biological entity, but is expected to fulfil certain functions according to the norms of her society. Thus while all women are members of the female sex, their gender roles may vary according to the societies and families into which they are born.
Gender Role	The process by which roles are assigned to boys and to girls and later men and women, on the basis of social expectations.

Patriliny	Descent through the father's lineage.
Socialisation	The process through which young children are taught about roles, status, and expectation by family members and later by the school.
Women's Studies	This can be a separate discipline or can concentrate on revising existing syllabi and curricula by introducing data on women in a variety of roles. Currently, in India, there is no undergraduate degree in Women's studies, but attempts are being made to revise curricula at the college and university levels particularly in social sciences and humanities.

29.9   FURTHER READING

CSWI l974. *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India.* Ministry of Education and Social Welfare: New Delhi

Gopalan, Sarala 2002. *Towards Equality - the Unfinished Agenda. Status of Women in India.* National Commission for Women: New Delhi

Kapadia, Karin 2002. *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India.* Kali for Women: New Delhi

Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishna Raj 1987. *Women and Society in India.* Ajanta Books: New Delhi

29.10   SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   While discussions on differences between sexes generally focus on biological and reproductive functions, differences in gender relate to various other attitudes. These attitudes may be social and cultural as well.

ii)   By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with gender. These attributes arise out of interaction of a complex set of factors, many of which operate in the context of the family.

iii) Men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision-making and are far more visible and audible than their wives.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   a

ii)   b

Check Your Progress 3

i)   It is not only because of the poverty and scarcity in the family but also because of perceptions and expectations. It is assumed that men need

better and more food, because they work hard and are the breadwinners. The fact that women's hard work and earnings are rarely taken into consideration. These perceptions are part of system where little value is attached to female life.

ii) One reason is that women do not remain long enough in a profession or job to be eligible for promotions. Besides this, familial reasons such as marriage, limited physical mobility due to nature of husband's employment, household responsibilities and the process of socialisation in the family where girls are trained to be good housewives are also responsible.

UNIT 30 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Structure

30.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have discussed the historical and contemporary dimensions of women's movement in India. After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe women's movement as an important variant of social movement

- explain how women's issues are raised in the reform movements of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

- state and describe the basic aspects of women's organisation, issues and their participation in the freedom movement

- describe the changing facets of women's movement in the post-Independence period

- explain the resurgence of women's movement in the 70s and 80s.

30.1   INTRODUCTION

Social movement has been defined as an organised effort by a group of people either to bring or resist change in the society. Women's movement is an important variant of social movement in the sense that it aims to bring changes in the institutional arrangements, values, customs and beliefs in the society that have subjugated women over the years. In section 30.2 of this unit we have discussed women's movement as an important variant of social movement. The reform movements of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on women's issues. The Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj played important role in projecting women's issues in a wider context. You will find these aspects in section 30.3. Social reforms among the Muslim women have also been discussed in this section. In section 30.4 you will read about women's organisation and participation in the independent movement. In this section you will also observe the role played by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru in encouraging women to participate in the independence struggle.

In the post-Independence period constitutional provisions and social legislations for women, planned economic development and social change affected women's movement significantly. We discuss the changing facets of women's movement in the post-Independence period in section 30.5. During the 1970s and 1980s occured the resurgence of women's movement in India. Section 30.6 of this unit deals with this aspect. Here we discuss the attempts of women to organise on the basis of ecological, social and economic issues. Issue-based movements in the 1970s and 1980s included anti-dowry, anti-sati, anti-rape movements. Here we also discuss the emerging trends of the contemporary women's movement and government's response to women's issues.

30.2   WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: A VARIANT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The study of social movements is not an area for historians alone. Sociologists studying social structure, processes and change would logically be interested in social movements. It is a process through which a collective attempt is made at mobilisation for change or resistance. However, in the context of change it differs from **evolutionary process** of social mobility and change in the sense that movements are based on a perception of injustice or oppression of a certain section or sections within the society. Social movements adopt protest, confrontation or conflict as a method to focus attention on different issues and attempt to bring about qualitative changes in the traditional social structures and social relationships, which are unequal and oppressive. The women's movement is an important variant of social movements. It is an important but neglected aspect of studies on social movements like tribal and ethnic, peasant and workers, backward classes, cultural and religious movements, etc.

In Indian society, differences based on caste, class, religious and ethnicity distinguish the life and problems of women in different parts of the country. An overwhelming majority of 80 percent people in India live in rural areas. The process of development and change affects various sections of women differently. It is in the context of a culturally diverse and stratified or unequal society that the emergence of women's movement needs to be understood.

In this unit women's movement is discussed under four broad headings i) Reform Movements and Women's issues, ii) Women's participation in the freedom movement. iii) Institutional initiatives and women's issues in the post-Independence period and iv) Resurgence of women's movement in the 70s and 80s. Let us begin with the first one.

30.3 REFORM MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The position of women in India has varied in different periods and in different classes, religion and ethnic groups. By nineteenth century there were several evil social practices like Sati (burning of widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, polygamy etc. which were a matter of debate.

During the British rule the spread of English education and Western liberal ideology among Indians and spread of Christianity and missionary activities, resulted in a number of movements for social change and religious reform in the nineteenth century.

The broad objectives of these movements were caste reform, improvement in the status of women, promoting women's education and an attack on social practices whose roots lay in social and legal inequalities and religious traditions of different communities.

In the earlier phase of the social reform movement during nineteenth century, the initiatives came largely from male reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The issues that were taken up by them were Sati, ill treatment of widows, ban on widow remarriage, **polygyny**, child marriage and denial of property rights to women and the need to educate women. Struggle for women's education initiated by men resulted in setting up of women's schools, colleges, hostels, widow homes, protection homes etc. The social reformers' assumptions were that female education would revitalise the family system, which was threatened by the increasing communication gap between educated men and their uneducated wives. The social reform movement saw the emergence of women's organisations and institutions. However, the movement was led by men and originated in **metropolitan cities**.

Leaders of the social reform movement also realised that religious reforms cannot be separated from it. The British policy was to keep different religious communities separate from each other and maintain each system of family laws, which was closely related to the religious and customary traditions of each community. Social reform movement never developed as a unified movement but developed within each community.

This period has witnessed the proliferation of various organisations. These organisations took the lead to project important issues, which adversely affected the status of women in the society. The most important of these organisations where the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj. In the following section, we shall be discussing these organisations briefly.

30.3.1 The Brahmo Samaj

It was founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1825, and attempted to remove restrictions and prejudices against women, which had their roots in religion. These included child marriage, polygyny, limited rights to inherit property and seclusion of women. Education of women was seen as the major instrument to improve women's position. Keshab Chadra Sen stressed the need for educating women at home and government support was sought for this purpose. A women's magazine called *Bamabodhini Patrika* was started. An inter-caste marriage was also solemnised under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj. Opposition to such moves from Hindu orthodoxy resulted in the passing of Civil Marriage Act, 1872. This Act, which permitted inter-caste marriage and divorce, fixed 14 and 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys respectively.

The influence of the Brahmo Samaj was confined to Bengal and North India.

30.3.2 The Prarthana Samaj

It was founded in 1867 and had more or less similar objectives as Brahmo Samaj. However, it remained confined to western India. M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar were the leading figures. In 1869 the Bombay Widow Reforms Association was formed which arranged the first widow remarriage in 1869. Two leaders of the Prarthana Samaj, R.G. Bhandarker and N.G. Chandravarkar, later became Vice-chancellors of the first Women's University set up by Karve in 1916 in Bombay. This was later named as the SNDT Women's University.

Both these movements stressed women's education to bridge the widening gap between males who had the benefit of modern education and women of the family.

The idea was to make them better wives and mothers. The debate on women's education that raged in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows that it did not originate from the influences of Western education only. Other reformers also stressed the need for women's education.

Both these movements were the outcome of the reaction of urban, western educated men and aimed to change women's position within the family.

30.3.3 The Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. Unlike the above two movements the Arya Samaj was a religious revivalist movement. While rejecting Hindu religious orthodoxy, idol worship and the caste society, the slogan of this movement was to go back to the vedic period. Painting a glorious position of women in ancient India, it advocated reform in the caste system, compulsory education for both men and women, prohibition of child marriage by law, remarriage of child widows. It was opposed to divorce and

widow remarriage in general, and emphasised separate school for girls and boys. Several Arya Kanya *Pathashalas* were set up which later became colleges and contributed to the cause of women's education. Though mainly an urban movement, its influence also extended to semi-urban and rural areas. While rejecting the caste system it never demanded its abolition. Preference for arranged marriages within the caste group and emphasis on home-making roles of women limited its contribution to the cause of women's emancipation.

Social reformers (like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, M.G. Ranade and Swami Dayanand Saraswati) eulogised the position of women in ancient India. However, the radicals like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule and Lokhitvadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh attacked the caste system, which they said was responsible for the subjugation of women. Phule said that Sudras and women had been denied education so that they would not understand the importance of human rights of equality and freedom and would accept the low position accorded to them in law, custom and traditions.

30.3.4 Muslim Women and Social Reform

Similar movements began, within the Islamic community in the late nineteenth century. However, emphasis on *purdah* system and slow spread of education among women delayed the development of a progressive movement to improve the opportunities for Muslim women. People like Begum of Bhopal, Syed Ahmad Khan and Sheikh Abdullah in Aligarh and Karmat Hussain in Lucknow spearheaded a movement to improve women's education. In 1916 Begum of Bhopal formed the All-India Muslim Women's Conference. The traditionalists disapproved such activities and were enraged by the resolution passed by the Muslim Women's Conference in 1917 that polygamy should be abolished. In the later years several Muslim women joined the nationalist struggle and non-cooperation movement against the British.

Similar movements also emerged among other communities in different regions. A few women leaders like Pandita Ramabai and Vidyagouri Neelkant faced bitter opposition for marrying out of caste or obtaining education.

All these movements had a very limited perspective of changing the position of women within the family without challenging the social structure and caste inequalities, which perpetuated women's lower position. Their appeal was limited to urban middle class. The gender bias of the reform movement was most pronounced in the argument that education would improve women's efficiency as housewives and mothers. Gender equality was not on their agenda.

The movement was not conceived as a radical onslaught on the religious orthodoxy, which subjugated women. Social reformers viewed women's question as a social problem.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   What were the major objectives of the social and religious movements of the nineteenth century? Answer in about four lines.

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ii) What were the major women issues raised by the Brahmo Samaj? Answer in about four lines

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iii) Tick mark the correct answer of the following question.

Which of the following movements pointed out the glorious position of women in the ancient India?

a) Arya Samaj

b) Prarthana Samaj

c) Brahmo Samaj

d) All of the above

30.4 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

During the freedom movement, the struggle for Women's right and equality was seen as an integral part of the struggle for national Independence. Many women who fought for the country's freedom were also active on the issues of women's rights. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded. In its 1889 Bombay Session, ten women participated. With the spread of women's education among middle class by the last part of the nineteenth century, several women became active in the social and political life of India. Gandhiji's call to women and large scale participation of women in India's freedom movement brought about changes in the perception of nationalist leaders.

30.4.1 Role of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru

Mahatma Gandhi played the most significant role in involving large number of women in the nationalist movement. Hence it is important to understand the impact of Gandhian ideology on women's movement. He proclaimed: "Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of activities of men and she has the same right to freedom and / liberty as he.... By sheer force of vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have". He said "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights". However, at the same time he idealised mythical figures like Sita, Damyanti who were symbols of women's sufferings. He stressed that participation of women in the freedom struggle was an integral part of women's *dharma* (duty). He felt that women were most suited for *Satyagraha* (protest) as they have qualities

appropriate for non-violent struggle and for constructive social uplift programmes of the Congress. He said women had great qualities for self-sacrifice and tolerance and an ability to endure suffering, which were needed for non-violent struggle. He saw women's role as complementary to men.

Jawaharlal Nehru was influenced by the Western suffragettes and was exposed to liberal views on women's question in the West. He believed that 'without economic freedom other aspects of women's equality would not be realised'. He disagreed with the limited view that women's education alone can bring about the desired changes and he wanted women trained in all human activities. He said that "if women's struggles remained isolated from the general political, economic and social struggles, the women's movement would not gain strength and will remain confined to the upper classes".

There cannot be any doubt that a single factor which contributed to the transformation of women's roles and status in the Indian society was their massive participation in the national freedom movement. Equality between men and women was accepted as one of the objectives in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Indian National Congress in 1931.

30.4.2 Women's Organisations and Issues

The emergence of women's organisation was closely linked with both social reform movement and the nationalist movement. During the early twentieth century several women's organisations were formed. The Women's India Association (WIA) was formed in 1917 by Margaret Cousins, an Irish and an Indian nationalist. This was followed by the formation of the National Council of Indian Women (NCIW) in 1926 and All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927. Jyoti Singh in Gujarat (1934) played an active role in harnessing energies of women. Several women active in the nationalist movement became founders of women's organisations.

i)   **Women's Suffrage**

For the first time in 1917, the demand for women's right to vote was raised. A deputation of women including Sarojini Naidu and Margaret Cousins met the Viceroy to put forward the demand for female **franchise**. The Indian National Congress supported the idea and the constitutional reforms in 1919 allowed provincial legislatures to decide the issue. Madras was the first province to allow women to vote. Women also became legislative councillors. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first woman to become legislative councillor in Madras in 1927. The demand for women's suffrage was later changed to adult franchise within the national movement.

ii)   **Question of Participation in the Freedom Movement**

Despite women's active participation in the freedom movement and demand for voting rights, when the civil disobedience movement began in 1930 some of the women leaders took a position that women's organisations should keep away from party politics as women were concerned with social issues and British Government's help was necessary to bring about social change in women's position through education and legislation. There were other women leaders, however, who believed that they should align themselves with the national movement. They believed that sitting on the fence served no purpose and women will progress only with political emancipation.

The gradual change in looking at women's issues, from social and educational to political perspectives, occurred with a closer link between the Congress and women's groups and mass participation of women in the freedom movement. Many advocates of women's rights looked upon freedom for women as dependent on freedom for the country. In the 1920s and 1930s women participated actively in the Civil Disobedience movement. Women were more active in *Swadeshi* movement (campaign to wear home spun *Khadi*) and picketing of shops selling foreign goods and liquor.

Advocates of women's participation in the freedom movement, however, stressed that though Indian culture approved women's equality, it recognised their goals as separate from that of men.

30.4.3 Forms of Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement

Women participated in the freedom movement in various ways. They participated in political protests, picketed shops selling foreign goods and organised *Prabhat Pheri* (singing patriotic songs). Women all over the country provided food and shelter for underground political activists and carried messages to political prisoners. In 1930, women in large-number participated in Salt March (Gandhiji urged people to break the salt law by making salt themselves). Thousands of women were jailed.

Within the Indian nationalist groups, however, there were a few more militant groups, which were active in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra as well as abroad. Some foreign women also worked with Indian revolutionaries abroad. Bhikaiji Cama, Perm D S Captain, Saraladevi Choudhurani (Bengal), Sushila Devi and Durga Devi (Punjab), Roopavati Jain (Delhi), Kalpana Dutt and Kamala Dasgupta (Calcutta), Lakshmi Sahgal (who was in charge of the Rani Jhansi Women's regiment, part of the Indian National Army formed by Subhas Chandra Bose) were involved in revolutionary activities.

Women's participation in the national movement helped in breaking several of the old barriers of tradition and custom. Women's organisation side by side raised their voices for removal of social and legal disabilities; however, these organisations were dominated by urban middle and upper classes. Women from poor working class families and their problems hardly came into the picture.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What were the two opposite positions, taken by the women's organisations, on the question of their participation in the Nationalist movement? Answer in eight lines.

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ii) Write a note on Nehru's views on women's equality and women's movement in Indian society. Answer in about ten lines.

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30.5 INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

In the post Independence period a series of institutional initiative has been introduced for the emancipation of women in the society. The most important of these pertain to the constitutional provisions and social legislation for women and planned economic development. Women's movement has been widely influenced by these broad socio-economic and political processes of this period. Let us examine briefly a few important aspects of these processes and the manner they have affected women's movement in the latter half of the twentieth century.

30.5.1 Constitutional Provisions and Social Legislations

The Constitution of independent India followed the basic principle of women's equality as accepted in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress. The provision of Article 15(3), which empowered the state to make special provisions for women and children, suggests that there was a realisation of women's disadvantaged position and the need for the state to enact special measures to bring them at par with men.

During freedom movement it was felt that with the nation's Independence would disappear many of the disabilities, and problems of women attributed to colonial rule. The national government undertook to remove the legal disabilities suffered by women and initiated major reforms in Hindu family laws. The legal reforms in the 1950s sought to provide greater rights to Hindu

women in marriage, inheritance and guardianship. However, they failed to bridge the gap between legal and social realities. Similar changes in the family laws of other communities like Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews, have not yet come up due to political resistance despite the Directive Principle of State Policy clearly stating the need for uniform laws for all the communities.

With these legislative measures in the fifties women's organisation became passive and lost the vigour shown during the pre-Independence period. Several of these organisations received government grants and their activities were shaped by the grants they received for activities like adult education, nutrition programmes for children, tailoring classes under vocational training programmes and family planning programmes. Most of these organisations were urban-based and the leadership came from the educated middle and upper class women.

In the post-Independence period, two important organisations for rural women were set up, i.e., Kasturba Memorial Trust and *Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh* (Indian Rural Women's Organisation). Their main objective was to assist the rural women in developing leadership potential.

30.5.2 Planned Development and Women's Issues

In the post-Independence period it was assumed that economic development policies i.e., agriculture development and modernisation, industrialisation, technological development etc., will bring about better life for everyone including women. The overall growth strategies failed to take note of the existing class, caste and gender inequalities. Planned development in India increased socio-economic inequalities. Let us discuss the observation in more detail.

i) **Thrust of Development Policies**

The main thrust of development policies for women was provision of education, health and welfare. The continued absence of concern for women's economic roles till the Sixth Five-Year Plan shows that women's economic independence was given a low priority. In the Sixth Plan a separate chapter on women and development was included in the Plan document for the first time. It reviewed the status and situation of women in general and came to the conclusion that in spite of legal and constitutional guarantees, women had lagged behind men in almost all sectors. For the first time it clearly spelt out that the economic independence would improve the status of women and suggested setting up of cells at the district level for increasing women's participation through employment. The successive five-year plans continued suggesting programmes for the improvement of the status of women. The Ninth Plan stressed the need for national policy for the empowerment of women for empowering women as the agents of social change. It also discussed the need for reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and State legislative assemblies. However, it must be said that women are as yet nowhere near receiving their due share of the planned development (Seth 2001). Apart from this the nature of economic development in the post-Independence India benefited only a small section of urban educated middle and upper class women whose visibility as legislators, administrators, doctors, lawyers, teachers etc. led to an erroneous belief that women have made great strides and have achieved equality.

ii) **Women's Educational and Economic Status**

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) was a watershed in the debate on women's issues in India. The Committee provided evidence of the decline in women's employment due to technological changes, biases on the part of employers to 'replace women by men and machines'. High illiteracy among women particularly among the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and poor rural and urban women coupled with inadequate training facilities for them. In the year 1981 the rate of female literates was around 29 percent and in the years 1991 and 2001 this rates was 39.29 and 54.16 respectively. In the rural areas the female literacy rates was around 21 percent and 30 percent in 1981 and 1991 respectively.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India was of the view that planners, government officials, employers and trade union leaders perpetuated the middle class perceptions of women's primary role as the homemaker and not as the bread winner. Such a view ignores the realities of millions of women in the poorer sections in rural and urban areas, who work for the survival of the family. Millions of rural women work hard on family farms and within the home as unpaid workers, collect fuel, fodder and water, work as artisans, craftworkers (weaving, cane and bamboo works etc.) with their men but are recognised as helpers and not as workers. When they work as wage labourers they are invariably paid less wages than men. The Government passed the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), however, it remains ineffective.

The neglect of women's economic roles, which you will study in greater detail in unit 31 of this Block, results in exploitation of women workers, unequal wages between men and women, higher unemployment due to loss of jobs in traditional sectors like textiles, mining, manufacturing and household industries.

30.5.3 Women's Political Representation

Several women leaders, who had actively participated in the freedom movement, occupied important positions in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha (the two houses of Parliament), state legislatures. They became governors, chief ministers, cabinet ministers and held other position within major political parties. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister. Despite the prominence and high visibility of a few women at all levels of political leadership women remain underrepresented. Their number has never gone beyond seven per cent in the Lok Sabha or State Assemblies. Forty eight women MPs were members of the thirteenth Lok sabha.

One of the weaknesses in the political strategies of women's organisations in the 1950s and 1960s was their inability to mobilise ordinary women and issues that concerned them. The lack of efforts to reach to the masses and expand the base of women's movement limited its effectiveness and agenda for action. The position of peasant and working class women deteriorated and only a small minority of women benefited. The 73rd and 74th amendments in the Constitution have, however, brought reservation of 33.33 percent for women in local governance at the Panchayat level. More on this point will be discussed later in this unit.

i)   What is the constitutional provision for women's upliftment? Answer in
       about four lines.

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       ....

ii)   Point out one weakness of the political strategies of women's organisations
       in the fifties and sixties. Answer in two lines.

       ....

       ....

30.6   RESURGENCE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE 70S: ISSUES AND ACTIONS

The late 1970s and 1980s was marked by a resurgence of women's struggle
and emergence of new women's groups and organisations. After their
participation in nation's independence struggle women again withdrew from
public life and the debate on women's issues also faded out from the public
arena. Several scholars have talked about the absence of women's movement
in the 1950s and 1960s in India and the slow erosion of concern for women's
issues. The growth of 'protest polities' and breaking out of a limited perspective
of legislation and education as the main instrument for improving women's
position marked the women's movement in the 1970s. Even the older women's
organisations set up during the pre-Independence or during the 1950s which
were mainly engaged in 'welfare' and 'charity' work, gradually started
changing their stand on several issues concerning women. There were various
issues that inflamed women's movement in India. Figure 30.1 depicts some of
them.

However, many women activists, who were working with political parties,
trade unions, peasant and workers movements, realised that they were hesitant
to take up issues which concerned women exclusively. The issues women
raised were the retrenchment of women from textile mills and other industries
due to technological changes and replacing them by men who received training
on new machines, lack of maternity benefit to women workers, lack of
provision of children at work place, wage discrimination between men and
women, inadequate education and training facilities for women workers and
discrimination at work places. These led to the emergence of separate women's
organisations in various parts of the country, which seriously attempted to
organise poor women for change.

Figure 30.1 Women's Movement

30.6.1 Emergence of New Organisations and Approaches

The growing economic hardships of poor rural and urban women (fifty per cent of the households were below poverty level at the end of the Sixth Five Year Plan) and failure to take up women's issues by the general agrarian and industrial workers' movements resulted in women labourers organising separately. Let us now look at the new organisations and approaches in more detail.

i)   Organisation

Such new organisations as Self-Employment Women's Association (Gujarat), Working Women's Forum (Tamil Nadu), Sramik Mahila Sangathna (Maharashtra) concerned themselves with the plight of women workers in the unorganised sector. Organising women labour and taking up the issues of their wages, working conditions, exploitation and health hazards became an important task for these women's organisations. Research on women in the unorganised sector helped in developing new strategies for dealing with the problems of poor rural and urban workers.

Anti-price rise movement in 1973-74 was a united front of women's organisations belonging to several parties.

ii)   **Approaches**

In the late nineteen seventies several women's organisations emerged which were not affiliated to political parties or to trade unions. They were called 'autonomous women's organisations'. They rejected the 'welfarist' approach adopted by the previous women's organisations, many of which were set up during the pre-Independence period, and adopted 'protest polities' for mobilising women on specific issues.

30.6.2 Deforestation and Ecological Movement

Economic hardships faced by women in the Himalayan region due to cutting down of forests resulted in spontaneous mobilisation of women. They hugged the trees to prevent the contractors from felling them. This is popularly known as *Chipko* movement. The disappearance of forests means acute hardships to women who are primarily responsible for the collection of fuel, fodder, fruits, herbs for medicine and other forest produce which give them income and employment. This is why we find that women are even now in the forefront of these ecological agitations.

30.6.3 Issue Based Movements in the 1970s and 1980s

The ineffectiveness of social legislation at reform is clearly indicated by several studies in the 1970s. The autonomous women's organisations' took up issues related to women's oppression like dowry, violence within the family, alcoholism among men and wife-beating, discrimination at the work place etc. to mobilise women for collective action. For the first time some groups in Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Patna etc. raised issues such as sexual exploitation of poor scheduled castes and scheduled tribe women by upper caste landlords. Issues of rape, dowry murders, crime and violence against women were taken up. All India anti-dowry and anti-rape movements were launched by women's organisations and Civil liberties and democratic rights organisations also joined them. They launched important issue based movements. Let us examine few of these movements.

i) **Anti-dowry Movements**

Dowry murders have witnessed a sustained campaign by several women's organisations and civil rights groups. Journalists wrote extensively about the dowry problem. In the 1980s several women's and other progressive organisations formed a joint front in Delhi called "*Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch*". Organisations in other major cities also campaigned through protest, demonstrations, discussions, street theatre, posters etc. against the ghastly murders of young brides for dowry. The Law Commission and the Parliamentary Committee also looked into the problem. After a sustained campaign, finally a Bill was introduced in the Parliament in 1984, which made certain changes in the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act of 1961. The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1984 was passed. The Act sets a limit to the amount given in dowry but does not ban dowry. While cruelty by the husband and his relatives leading to suicide or death has become an offence, punishable with imprisonment, still dowry deaths continue. In 1986 alone 1,285 dowry deaths were reported but there were few convictions. In 1998, as many as 6917 dowry deaths were reported throughout India (National Human Development Report 2002).

ii) **Anti-sati Movement**

In 1829 the practice of Sati was abolished through a legislation which marked the culmination of a debate initiated by the British.

The burning of a young widow Roop Kanwar in 1988 on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala, Rajasthan, sparked off strong protests by women's organisations. The delayed response of the government came in the wake of mounting agitation in the shape of Commission of Sati (Prevention) Bill, which

was hurriedly passed in the Parliament. The Act assumes that it is a practice sanctioned by the custom. It does not seek to punish those who profit by raising money by selling photographs and raising donations in the name of so called 'sati'. There is nothing on preventive action. The pre-sati feeling within the community mounted a counter agitation against the so called attack on their religious custom. It is strange that the barbaric practice, against which social reformers raised their voices, still persists in a country, which reveres mother goddesses.

iii) **Anti-rape Movement**

An anti-rape movement was launched in the last decade demanding review of the Supreme Court judgment in a rape case, which acquitted the culprit. Women activists forced the government to review Rape Laws. Several women's organisations and legal and social activists held discussions with the Law Commission to amend the law and in 1983 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act was passed.

In the 1990s women took up the issue of communalism and globalisation through a wider networking both at the national and international level. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the women's organisations in India are linked together through networks on different issues and campaigns. While former methods of protest and advocacy are still used, new methods of resistance and mobilisation for change are also being evolved.

30.6.4 The Emerging Trends and Government's Response

One should not get the impression that women's movement in India is largely urban based. We find that it has also involved middle class educated women. There are several active grassroot organisations of poor rural and urban working class women, tribal, self-employed women who are fighting against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation. Various national and regional political parties and trade unions have also set-up women's wings.

As a response to women's movement that began in the late 1970s, the government set up women's cells within a few ministries (Rural Development, Labour and Human Resource Development). In government's programme for rural poor 30 per cent women beneficiaries are to be selected for training and income generation programmes. In the late 1980s the government prepared a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 A.D.), which has made several recommendations relating to legal, economic, social and political status of women. The government also appointed a National Commission on self-employed women and women in the informal sector to look into the specific problems of unorganised women labour who constitute eighty seven per cent of women workers but do not get any protection from Labour Laws like equal wages, maternity benefits, childcare facilities and better working condition. The 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution prepared in the late 1980s was passed in 1993 and it contained an across the board reservation of 33.33 percent in panchayats, panchayat samitis, zilla parishads and local body institutions for women. The National Commission for Women was set up in 1992 envisaging to cover all facets of issues relating to safeguarding women's rights and promotion of their empowerment. It was visualised as an expert body to advice the government on women's issues and be a powerful advocate of their rights and hence a statutory body to lend it independence (*Annual*

Report of Women and Child development Department, Ministry of Human Resources, 2002). Besides this the government has come out with various programmes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY), Swasakthi Project etc. for the benefit of the women.

The shift in issues and agenda for action within the women's movement and response from the government are also due to the fact that research on women's problems, particularly on women in the working class and other weaker sections especially during the 1970s and 1980s has thrown several challenges for the women's movement as well as the government.

The new knowledge, being generated by scholars to understand the subordination and oppression of women and their points of strength, is broadly termed as 'women's studies' or 'gender studies'. It is gradually finding a place in universities, colleges and schools as teaching material. 'Women's Studies' scholars and women's organisations see a strong link between 'Women's Studies' and action for change. The women's movement during 1970s and 1980s while being effective in bringing women's issues back into the arena of public debate, was only a beginning of the long struggle ahead for equality, justice and dignity to all women.

Activity 1

Read section 30.6 again very carefully and list the issues that have led to agitation among women in the 1980s. Now write an essay comparing these issues with the issues prevalent in your society. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes prepared by other learners in your Study Centre.

Check Your Progress 4

Tick mark the correct answers to the following questions.

i) Which one of the given issues is not raised by the women's organisations in the post-Independence period?

    a) Lack of maternity benefits

    b) Wage discrimination between men and women

    c) Replacement of male workers by trained female workers

    d) Lack of provisions of childcare

ii) What was responsible for the shift in responses of the government regarding women's issues in the post-Independent period?

    a) Shift in issues and agenda for actions within women's movement

    b) Research on women's problems

    c) Both of the above

    d) None of the above

30.7   LET US SUM UP

This unit began with a brief discussion on women's movement as an important variant of social movement. Then we discussed how women's issues were focused in the reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially in the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj movements and in the social reform movements among the Muslim women. We have also discussed in detail the aspects of women's issues and women's participation in the nationalist movement. The broad socio-economic and the political processes, which have affected women's movement in the post-Independence period, are also discussed in this unit. Lastly, we have discussed the resurgence of women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

30.8   KEY WORDS

Evolutionary Process	A process of gradual change in a society from one stage to the other
Franchise	Right to cast vote
Metropolitan city	Urban places with more than one million population
Polygyny	A form of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife at the same time

30.9   FURTHER READING

Jayawardena, K. 1986. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World.* Kali for Women; New Delhi (Chapter 6)

Geabrielle, D. 1988. *Women's Movement in India: Conceptual and Religious Reflections.* Breakthrough: Bangalore.

Seth, Mira 2001. *Women's Development the Indian Experience.* Sage Publications: New Delhi

30.10   SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   The broad objectives of these movements were caste reform, improvement in the status of women, promoting women's education and an attack on social practices whose roots were in social and legal inequalities and religious traditions of different communities.

ii)   The restrictions and prejudices against women which had their roots in religion. These included child marriage, polygamy, limited rights to inherit property and, seclusion of women. Education of women was seen as the major instrument to improve women's position.

iii) a)   Arya Samaj

Check Your Progress 2

i)   Some of the women leaders took position that women's organisation should keep away from the party politics as women were concerned with social issues. They also thought that the British Government's help was necessary to bring about changes in women's position through education and legislation. There were other women leaders, who believed that they should align themselves with the national movement, as they will progress only with political emancipation.

ii) Nehru believed that without economic emancipation, it is not possible to realise equality for women. He disagreed with the limited view that women's education alone can bring about the desired changes and he wanted women trained in all human activities. He said that if women's struggle remained isolated from the general political, economic and social struggles, the women's movement would not gain strength and will remain confined to upper classes.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India empowers the state to make special provision for women and children. It also suggests that there is a realisation of women's disadvantaged position and need for the State to enact special measures to bring them on par with men.

ii) Their inability to mobilise the ordinary women and to understand the issues which concerned these women.

Check Your Progress 4

i)   C

ii) C

UNIT 31   WOMEN AND WORK

Structure

31.0   OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the various social aspects of women's work. After studying this unit you should be able to

- describe the distinctive features of women's work

- describe the nature of paid and unpaid work within and outside the household

- explain the factors which determine women's work

- discuss the social, political and economic processes which transform women's work roles.

31.1   INTRODUCTION

In unit 29 of this Block we discussed how traditional expectations and concept of women's role have affected their status in our society. Work participation is an important indicator of one's status in the society. Women's work participation

has been affected by various socio-economic factors and traditional role expectations. Besides a significant amount of their work has remained invisible and unrecognized. In this unit we discuss some of the important aspects of women's work. This unit begins with a discussion on the nature, range and patterns of women's work within and outside the household. Here we will introduce you to the concept of 'work' and why much of the work which women do is not included while accounting for working population. The unit is divided into three major sections.

The first section (31.2) describes what women do and their direct and indirect contribution to the family and society both as paid and unpaid workers. An understanding of the determinants of women's work will help you understand the differentiation in men's and women's work roles in different socio-economic categories. The second section (31.3) of the unit provides an in-depth view of how such factors as sexual division of labour, differential socialisation of girls and boys and different role expectations, differential investment in their education, training and skill development, directly and indirectly lead to gender inequalities. The last section (31.4) discusses the processes, which transform women's work role in society.

31.2 NATURE, RANGE AND PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S WORK

In this section we shall be dealing with the various components of women's work. Women do various types of work. Their household work remains mostly invisible and unrecognised. Here it is essential to categorise various types of work done by women in terms of paid and unpaid work. This will give us a broad idea to understand the significance of women's work both in the family and in the society. Let us begin with the nature of women's work.

31.2.1 What is Women's Work?

According to anthropologists and some historians, women were the major producer of food, textiles and handicrafts throughout human history and continue to provide a major labour input where production is still in the small scale subsistence sector.

Defining the exact nature, scope and magnitude of women's work remains a problem area because a good deal of women's work is either invisible or is only partially accounted for in the data on workforce participation.

Components of women's work include housework, paid and unpaid work related to home-based craft activities, family enterprise or business and paid work outside home. You must have observed differential work participation of men, women and children within the family both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The kind of work women do is determined by women's position in the society and family's location in the social hierarchy. Figure 31.1 shows various forms of women's work.

The basic elements of women's work within the home are related to the division of labour between men and women. Activities included under 'housework' broadly differ according to age, gender, income, occupational group, location (rural/urban), size and structure of the family.
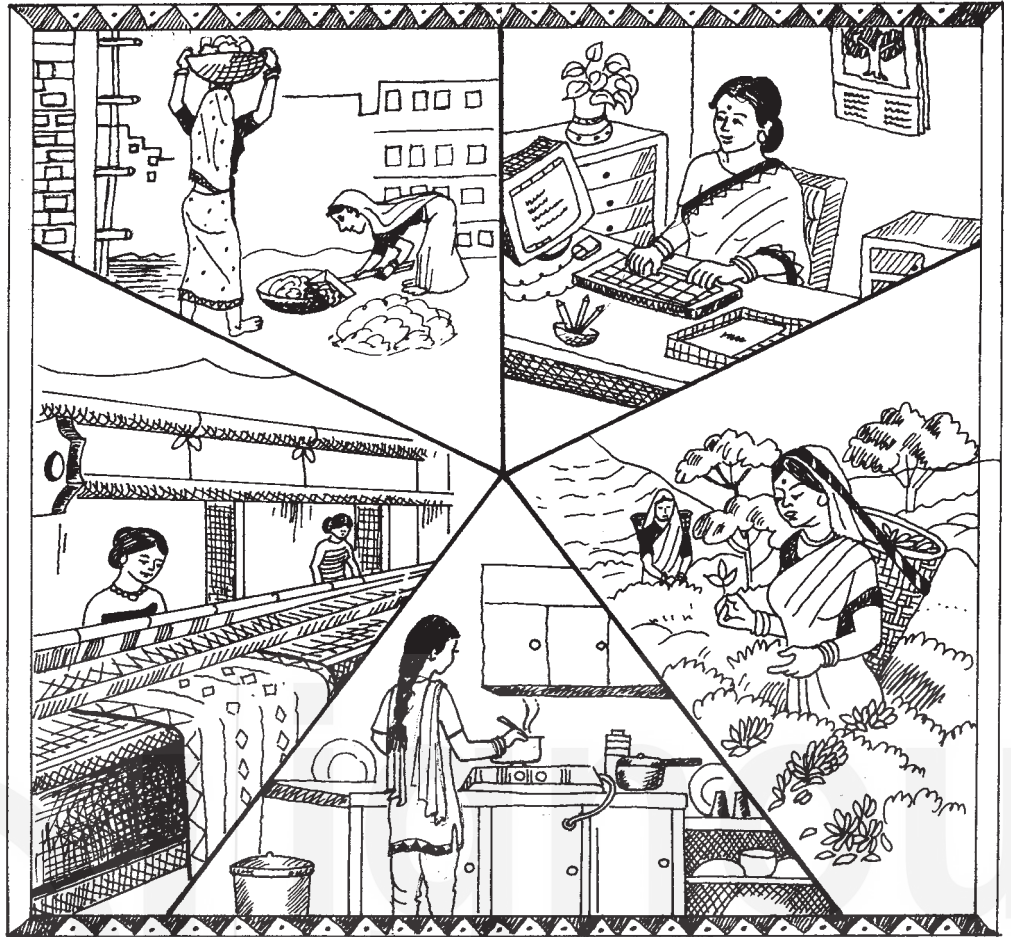
Figure 31.1 Women and work

31.2.2 Unpaid Work in Home-based Production and Family Farms

Economists distinguish between production for **self-consumption** and production for the market. Only the latter is counted as 'work'. The parameters of work used in official data reflect this bias. Much of the work that women do in household industries and processing of agricultural products, if unpaid, is not recognised as 'work' in the data systems.

In rural areas the women from the poorer households engage in various activities such as cooking, processing of food for household consumption, storing grains, childcare, fetching fuelwood, fodder and water, collection of forest produce, preparation of cow dung cakes, care of livestock and cattle and house repair and maintenance. Much of this work, which is important for the maintenance of families, is largely done by women. However, this work is unpaid and is not accounted for as productive work as it is meant for self-consumption. The conventional definition of 'work' does not include activities, which are of **use-value** and do not have **exchange-value**.

In the agricultural sector small and marginal farmer households utilise family labour as they cannot hire labour like big landlords. In the non-agricultural sector such as handicrafts, handloom weaving, pottery, food preservation and processing etc., a large proportion of women are home-based workers.

Activities like dairying, small animal husbandry (poultry, piggery, goatery etc.) fisheries, weaving, handicrafts, are family activities and every member assists

in some aspects of production. A major part of the work is done within the home and yet a woman is not accorded the status of a worker. Non-valuation of women's unpaid work within the home results in non-recognition of women's crucial economic contribution.

31.2.3 Female Child Labour

Girls continue to provide free labour in home-based production. Studies on rural girl child labour show that she works nine hours a day providing goods and services, which keep her out of school. She works on an average 318 days a year in the fields and at home providing free labour.

The 1981 Census reported that there were 1.4 crore child workers in India constituting 4.3 per cent of girls and 2.1 per cent of boys under fourteen years of age. Between 1971-81 while the percentage of working boys in rural areas declined, the percentage of working girls increased. This means that more girls are being inducted into work while more boys are sent to school thus widening the gap between boy's and girl's opportunities. According to the 1991 census figures there were 4.3 million female child labourers, out of which a vast majority (eighty one percent) were engaged in agriculture and related activities.

Girls are also employed in large numbers in carpet industry of Kashmir, in lock making in Aligarh, in gem polishing in Jaipur, in match industry in Sivakasi and in bidi rolling. In match industry of Sivakasi, ninety per cent child workers are girls under the age of fourteen. They work under hazardous condition. Female children working in home based industries are beyond the purview of child labour laws. These laws are not enforced even in factory based industries. Even in piece-rate system, her labour is seen as an extension of her mother's labour and is not given an independent value.

Such work cuts them off from schooling, literacy, learning technical skills and improving their job prospects. These handicaps remain insurmountable throughout the life.

31.2.4 Paid Work

Women also work for wages in fields, forests, mines, factories, offices, small scale and household industries. The nature and extent of such work differs according to the location of family in the social hierarchy. In the rural sector the subsistence work burden falls heavily on women, while in higher castes and higher income groups 'non-work' of women is given more value. Many micro studies have reported inverse relationship between income level of the household and nature of women's work participation. Women in the subsistence sector have no option but to work. However, their options are limited as they are non-entrants or drop-outs from school. They are often the primary breadwinners of the family, but the ideological bias views men as the primary breadwinner of the family. Let us examine some other important aspects of women's paid employment.

i) **Education, Paid Employment and Household Responsibilities**

The spread of education among the middle and upper class women has opened up new avenues of employment. However, we are to keep in mind here that education does not necessarily lead to employment. On the one hand, illiteracy

among the majority of women in the lower socio-economic group constitutes a major barrier to increasing and diversifying work and training opportunities. On the other hand, pre-defined roles, ideology and labour market forces in a labour surplus economy effectively restrict women's work opportunity among educated women of certain sectors. (Studies have shown wastage of skill and ability among women scientists and degree holders.)

In middle class families, women work for improving or maintaining the standard of living of the family or to provide a cushion against rising cost of living. Working outside home on the same terms and conditions, as men, does not absolve them from their domestic responsibilities. The **dual burden of work** creates physical, mental and emotional strain. Very few women may be lucky to get domestic help or kin-support. One of the consequences of double burden may be delayed promotions or sacrificing new job opportunities due to family responsibilities. Employment by itself does not guarantee equal sharing of work at home or better status of women.

ii) **Agricultural and Industrial Sectors**

Gender inequalities exist in all sectors. Inequalities are reflected in distribution of women workers in different sectors, in job hierarchies and in wages and earnings between men and women.

In the latter half of the twentieth century there was very little structural change in women's employment. The proportion of female agricultural workers which was less than one-third of the total workforce in 1951 rose to more than fifty per cent, which means greater dependence on agriculture sector. In 1993-94,
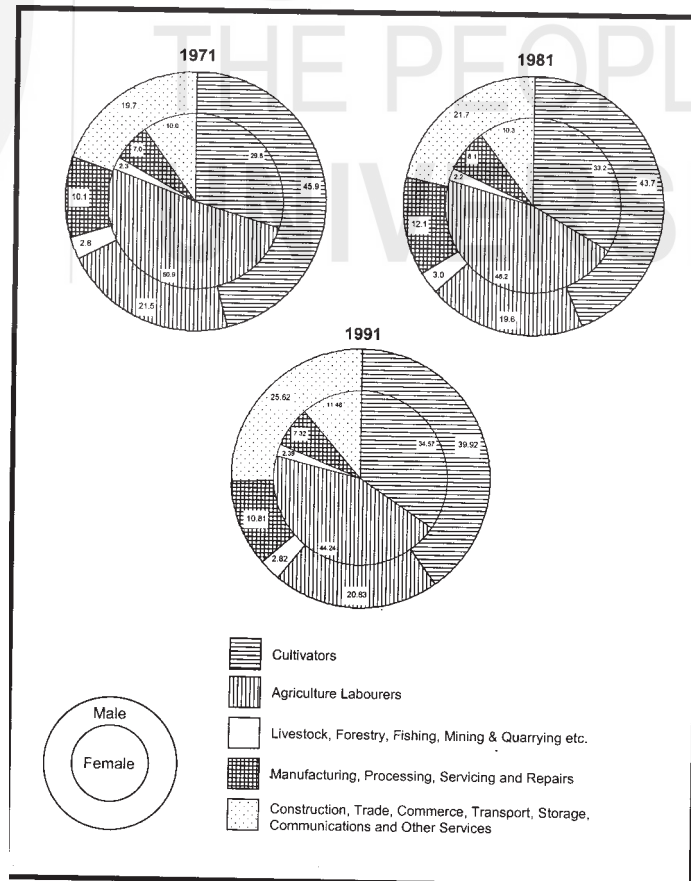
Figure 31.2 Work participation rate by sex in different sector of economy during 1971-1991

as many as 86.2 percent female workers were engaged in the primary sector, which includes agriculture and allied sector such as forestry, livestock etc., in the rural areas. Agriculture accounts for eighty seven percent of women work force in the rural areas and 17.5 percent in the urban areas. Within agriculture they mostly work as agricultural labourers or cultivators (NSSO 1996). Figure 31.2 shows the work participation of both men and women in different sectors of economy during 1971-1991 and figure 31.3 the work participation rate of the total population by sex and place of residence during 1961-2001.
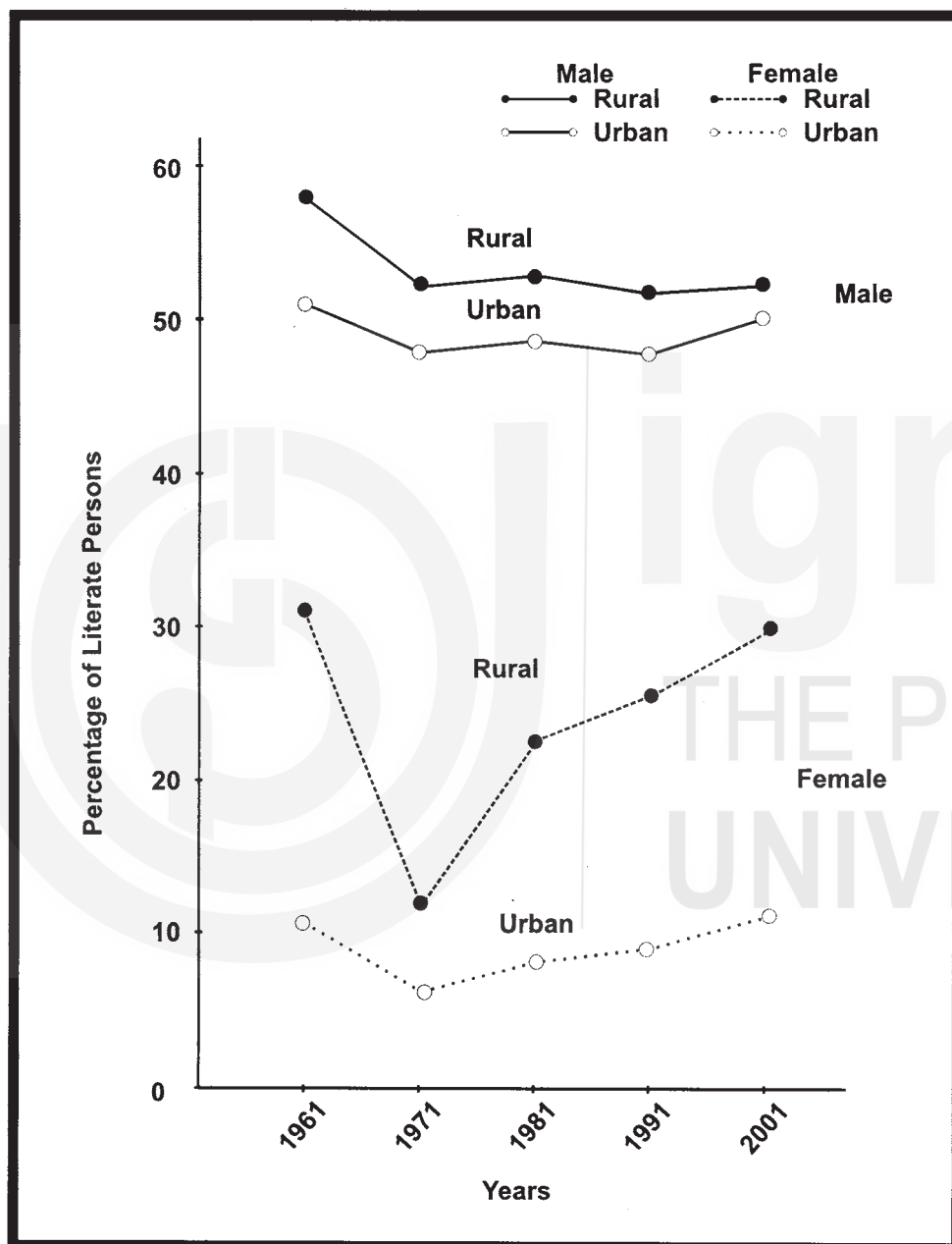
Fig. 31.3: Work participation rate in India by sex and place in residence (1961-2001)

Industrialisation has created more work opportunities for a small section of educated women but at the same time has reduced work opportunities for unskilled women workers who were the traditional workers in textiles, jute, mines etc.

Women workers are concentrated in plantations (seventy two per cent), food products, tobacco and textiles, cane and bamboo work, silk worm, rearing coir products, domestic services, education and health services. The high concentration of women in household industries rather than factory-based production affects their status as workers with no control on their labour and earnings.

iii) **Women in Services and Professions**

As far as women in services and professions are concerned there is no wage discrimination but they are concentrated in certain types of jobs like teachers, nurses, typists and stenographers and very few occupy higher positions in administration, business, technical jobs and professions.

Despite impressive increase in the number of educated women in urban areas the gap between men and women in the services and professions is large. The reasons are many. Some of them are given below.

a) Girls are generally socialised for their domestic roles

b) Less investment in the vocational and technical training of girls and female and male stereotypes determine attitude to work and differential expectations from girls education, which is rarely seen as an investment for future. In the middle class families it is seen as a contingency to be drawn on in times of need.

c) Higher concentration of girls is found in humanities and social sciences rather than vocational and technical courses.

d) There is less physical mobility among women after marriage.

iv) **Earning Differentials**

Earning differential has been a crucial feature of women's paid employment. The division of labour between men and women works against women. An expression of discrimination against women in labour market is wage differential. They not only get unequal pay for equal work but many jobs that women do are categorised as low skilled jobs for which lower wages are paid. For example, men usually do weaving which is better paid while spinning, usually done by women, is low paid. In construction also men are supposed to do skilled jobs and women do unskilled work and get lower wages. Sexual divisions of labour and lower duration of women's work are reflected into lower wages for women. Women workers on an average are found to earn only sixty percent of male wage for full time work. Wage differentials exist in both agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. The ratio of male to female real wage rates in agriculture is calculated as around 1.3 in 1995, i.e. for every one rupee earned by a female, the male earns 1.3 (thirty three percent) more (NSSO, 1996). Earning differentials also reflect differences in skill acquisition, education and training.

31.2.5 Women Workers and the Growth of Unorganised Sector

A majority of women (eighty seven per cent) are working in the rural and urban unorganised sector without the protection of labour legislation regarding

wages, hours of work, working conditions, health and maternity benefits and childcare services. Those women workers include agricultural and construction labourers, women in dairying, small animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, handlooms and handicrafts, small vendors and hawkers selling vegetables and food items, washer-women, scavengers, domestic servants, crafts workers and **piece rate** workers in home based production. The labour force in this sector is characterised by higher incidence of casual labour and intermittent nature of work, low wages, and low capital incentives.

In 1988, a National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector carried out a comprehensive analysis of the problem of these workers and suggested to undertake concrete actions for their protection and organisation. According to an estimate of the Commission ninety four percent of the total women labour force were in the unorganised sector. The Commission produced a report entitled '*Shram Shakti*', which made a number of important recommendations for legislative changes for the benefit of women.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   What are the major components of women's work? Use three lines to answer.

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ii) Write a short note on the types of unpaid work done by the women from the poor households in the rural areas. Use seven lines to answer.

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iii) Briefly narrate in about five lines, the impact of industrialisation on women.

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31.3 DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S WORK

There are various factors, which determine women's work. We can classify them under two broad headings: structural factors and socio-cultural factors. In this section we shall be examining these factors in detail. Let us begin with the structural ones.

31.3.1 Structural Factors

The key structural variables, which determine women's work, are: i) the family, caste, class and community, ii) regional differences, iii) labour market iv) environmental changes; and v) the growth of unorganised sectors.

i) **Family, Caste, Class and Community:** The inequalities in our social structure based on caste, class and community have a significant influence on women's work roles.

As you have already noted the basic elements of women's work within the family are related to division of labour between men and women. Learning role ideology is not only confined to family but to the world of school, media and work which also play an important role in perpetuating attitudes and beliefs regarding women's work roles.

Women from upper caste in rural areas do not engage in out of home wage employment, as 'non-work' is linked to the notion of 'higher status' and prestige. There are some caste-based occupations also such as smithery, pottery, weaving, leather work etc. where there is a well-defined sexual division of labour.

There are different notions among different classes, castes and community about 'appropriateness' or 'suitability' of certain types of work for women. For example, teaching and nursing are considered to be suitable jobs for women. So also in agriculture the tasks of sowing, threshing, breeding transplanting etc. are women's job. Differential access of women to education, training, and resources and skills among different classes also determines the types of work women do.

Majority of the schedule castes and schedule tribes have been socially and economically deprived. The Indian Constitution has made special provision for them and government has followed the policy of reservation of seats in educational institutions and jobs. However, majority of them are not able to take advantage of these provisions. Within these groups women are more deprived. The enrolment of girls is far below that of boys. In the year 2000-01, out of 10,995 students enrolled in the primary school only 4665 were girls. The reasons are both socio-economic and environmental constraints. Large number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women are landless labourers.

ii) **Regional Differences:** Another structural factor affecting women work participation in India is the regional variation. In the South, North-East and Central tribal belt, women's work participation is high in comparison to North India. Women's work participation is higher in rice growing areas than in wheat growing areas. The reasons are both cultural and economic.

iii) **Labour Market:** The family ideology which determines 'suitability' and 'unsuitability' of certain jobs for women is also reflected in job stereotyping in labour market. For example, in agriculture women do not plough, they do weeding, transplanting and harvesting. In industries like electronics women are mostly employed in assembly jobs. Similarly, in services women are concentrated in teaching, nursing and office jobs.

Activity 1

Observe the daily activities of two employed women preferably from different socio-economic backgrounds, continuously for one week. While observing please note the types of work done by them inside the house and, if possible, at the work place. Now write an essay in about 20 lines on the double burden of work regularly undertaken by them. Exchange your notes, if possible, with your co-learners at your Study Centre.

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iv) **Environmental Changes and Women's Work:** You have read earlier that women in poorer households spend a great deal of time in providing goods and services for family's needs. Many studies have shown that in the areas hit by water scarcity and deforestation, women spend long hours in collecting fuelwood for cooking, fodder for cattle and water for home consumption. In the hill areas of Uttar Pradesh women actively participate in the *Chipko* movement to prevent destruction of forest as it resulted in increasing difficulties in the collection of fuel, fodder and water and other daily requirements of their life (see Jain 1984).

31.3.2 Socio-cultural Factors

Values, institutions, norms, attitudes, customs, family ideology, process of socialisation, sexual division of labour, and self-perception are important socio-cultural variables affecting women's employment. Let us examine these variables briefly.

i) **Values, Norms, Attitudes and Customs:** Values, norms, attitudes and customs governing women's work are not static and keep changing over time and space, however these exercise greater control over women's work than in the case of men. For example, agricultural development has brought significant changes in the life style of the villagers in many agricultural developed areas. It has changed the values and attitudes to work among certain caste groups. Hence the obvious result has been that of the withdrawal of women from manual agricultural activities among these caste groups. Similarly, the process of Sanskritisation leads to the withdrawal of women from manual activities in the families moving up in the social hierarchy. Besides change in the values, norms and attitudes, existing social customs also affect women's work. For example, *purdah* system restricts women's mobility and work pattern.

ii) **Family Ideology and Socialisation of Girls:** Family ideology expresses itself in so many ways i.e. control over girls and women by defining sex roles, notions of family prestige/status, de-value women's work, girl's entitlement to family resources (health, nutrition, education) and structures of male dominance, supportiveness and conflict. Girls are socialised from their childhood to accept the family ideology. The traditional social isolation

process introduces gender stereotyping. It not only affects the women's work roles, but also determines the self-perception and role expectation. We have already discussed these aspects in unit 29 of this Block.

iii) **Gender-based Division of Labour:** The gender-based of labour not only defines the nature of work to be done by the women, it also imposes discriminatory work norms for them. It is one of the important reasons for the high concentration of women workers in the low paid jobs.

iv) **Self-Perception of Need to Work-choice vs. Compulsion:** Women internalise the ideology of gender roles. Their own perception of work and their attitude to work stems from the link seen between education, earnings and family's status and the importance of their economic contributions to the family. For middle class women in white-collar employment and for women in higher professions, work or employment has a different meaning than for agricultural labourers or factory workers or domestic workers. Clearly there is a difference in attitude to work depending on whether women are working for subsistence or for social mobility. The rationale for work is different in different sections. In poorer households women have no options but to work, yet their choices are severely restricted.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Narrate in six lines how caste values and sexual division of labour affect women's work participation.

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ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Tick mark T if it is true or F if it is false.

● Women's work participation is higher in the rice growing areas than in the wheat growing areas.   True/False

● In India, eighty-seven percent of the women working forceis engaged in the rural and urban organised sector. True/False

31.4 PROCESSES WHICH TRANSFORM WOMEN'S WORK ROLES

Social, economic and political processes transform women's work roles. In this section we shall discuss how these processes transform women's work role in society.

31.4.1 Education and Training

There are strong links between education, training and better-paid jobs. It is argued that women's education can help them to seek higher quality employment. Such evidence is visible among middle class educated working women in large cities.

There are a few problems still to be tackled. You must have noted that quality of education and access to professional and higher educational institutions differ according to classe and gender.

The problem of retaining girls in school and high drop-out rate is due to the fact that poor families rarely see education from the point of view of better prospects or investment for the future. The compulsions of daily living deprive girls of any meaningful investment in their education.

Only a small section of educated girls among middle and upper classes plan their careers. Sometimes their education is viewed as 'deferred' investment to be utilised when the need arises. Women opt for liberal arts, humanities and home science due to sex stereotyping of roles and sometimes reluctance on the part of families to make a long-term investment in technical and vocational education and training of girls and for various other reasons. This is clear from the enrolment figures of girls in vocational and technical institutions.

31.4.2 Technological Changes

Questions of technological changes and women's work cannot be studied without considering the issues of division of labour, ownership of means of production and inequality between men and women in control over resources and access to education and training.

For reasons stated earlier and class and gender bias in technical education, women are often at a disadvantaged position when technical changes are of labour-replacing type.

Agricultural modernisation and industrialisation have displaced women unskilled workers. For example, in green revolution areas mechanisation of farm operations like weeding, harvesting, threshing etc. has replaced women from their traditional jobs.

Data from several studies on the impact of technology on women industrial workers (in food, tobacco, textiles and minerals) demonstrates that capital intensive industries had adverse effect on female labour absorption. Introduction of technology needs new skills and training and women are often disadvantaged.

31.4.3 Access to Land and Other Productive Resources

In a culture with a universal preference for sons and a predominantly male inheritance system, gender often determines women's access to productive resources (Land, Capital and Technology). A combination of socio-economic factors determine women's access to resources further strengthening the barriers to their access to credit, technology and skill development to improve their earning opportunities. For example, women have low access to land. Since most of the land is owned by the male members of the family, institutional credits including technological know-how are sanctioned by the development agencies in the name of the male members of the household. Thus, deprived

of the productive resources, women become increasingly dependent on men. However, the dimension of this problem varies in different classes.

31.4.4 Women Producers and Worker's Organisation as Pressure Groups

Poor working women largely in the unorganised sector have gained very little from the trade union movement. Over the years the participation of women has not only decreased in the organised workforce but also within the trade unions. It is only since the nineteen seventies that efforts to organise women workers had slowly begun. Women workers organised to protect their rights and demanded access to resources, land, credit, market, raw material and training.

Activity 2

Interview five women, preferably from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Enquire from them about the form and extent of their ownership of land, household assets and the other productive resources. Now based on your findings write a note on women's assets and other productive resources. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

31.4.5 Macro Processes and State Policies

Changes in and expansion of work opportunities for women may be brought about through government policies in different sectors of economy and employment share of various sectors. For example, growing need for women doctors, teachers, nurses and functionaries for development programmes, i.e., health, education, welfare, rural development etc. will expand women's work opportunities. Similarly, location of industries or promotion and credit support for handicrafts, handlooms, dairy and fisheries etc. can bring about expanded work opportunities for women. Modernisation of industries or agriculture operations where women were employed earlier may, on the other hand, cause displacement. Policies of economic development relying on technological progress, export promotion and capital intensive industries have serious implications for women workers in the factory sector, if they do not have adequate training opportunities.

Within these given social processes women's work has to take into account the interconnections between gender-based division of labour, household work, access to resources, education and skill development and their economic roles. All women workers carry double burden. However, their family maintenance work remains invisible and unaccounted for. In poorer households the distinction between subsistence work and economic activity is very thin and is largely a matter of subjective judgement.

Most women work in the unorganised or informal sector marked by low wages, occupational segregation, exploitative working conditions and insecure employment. Only a small section of educated middle and upper class working women has benefited from expanding educational and employment opportunities.

Most of the women workers face varying degrees of discrimination (overt or covert) and forms of control due to gender-based division of labour and cultural factors. Gender-based role ideology of the patriarchal family restricts women's options by accentuating gender inequalities in education, vocational training and diversified job opportunities. Labour market discrimination partly reflects these differences, which is itself a consequence of discrimination within the family.

The year 2001 was declared by the government of India as 'women's year of empowerment', which had promised to ensure for women their rightful place in nation's social, political and economic life apart from equitable distribution of resources and a just social order (India 2003). But in contradiction to this promise of the government, more and more women are pushed to the labour market for survival mainly to the informal sector market which is highly exploitative and with little labour protection. The Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) was adopted by the government in 1991 as a part of the wider economic reforms, designed to open up the economy to the international competitiveness. Among other policy changes it included privatisation of public enterprises, devaluation of rupee, progressive abolition of subsidies, and financial cuts to the social programmes. Privatisation and export oriented production have given rise to a major increase in unemployment and the women are the worst affected since they are the ones to be sacked first. They find it hard to re-enter the organised work force. In the emerging scenario more and more women enter the unorganised sector, which is notorious for its exploitative labour, flouting of labour laws and hazardous to health.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   What has been the impact of modern technology on women's employment? Answer in four lines.

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ii) Write in five lines about the ways to bring about changes and expansions in women's work opportunities.

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31.5 LET US SUM UP

Work participation is an important indicator of status of an individual or a group in society. In this unit, we discussed the nature, range and patterns of

women's work participation in India. We discussed that women's work incorporates unpaid work in home-based production and family farm, women's work participation is affected by various structural and socio-cultural factors. Lastly, this unit examined the social, economic and political processes that may transform women's work roles in society.

31.6 KEY WORDS

Dual burden of work	Burden of unpaid household chores and paid employment
Exchange value	Price of a commodity or a service
Earning differentials	Difference in the earnings based on certain socio-economic attributes
Piece-rate system	Money paid per piece or for a fixed job
Self-consumption	Goods and services produced and consumed by a person or a family
Use-value	Intrinsic value of a commodity or service, which is not exchanged for money in the market

31.7 FURTHER READING

Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974. *Towards Equality.* Deptt. of Social Welfare, Govt. of India: New Delhi, Chapter V

Desai, N.and M. Kishnaraj (Ed.) 1987. *Women in Society.* Ajanta Publications: New Delhi

Jain, D and N. Banerjee (Ed.) 1985. *Tyranny of the Household ¯ Women in Poverty.* Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi

Marthe, Fetherold Loutifi 2002. *Women, Gender and Work: What is Equality and How do We Get it.* Rawat: New Delhi

31.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   The components of women's work include housework, paid and unpaid work related to home-based craft, activity, family enterprise or business and paid work outside home.

ii)   In rural areas women from the poorer households engage in activities such as cooking, processing food for household consumption, storing grains, childcare, fetching fuelwood, fodder and water, collection of forest produce, preparation of cow-dung cakes, care of livestock and cattle and house repair and maintenance. Much of this work which is important for

the maintenance of families is largely done by women is unpaid and is not accounted for production work as it is for self-consumption.

iii) The impact of industrialisation on women's work has not been uniform one. Though industrialisation has created work opportunities for a small section of educated women at the same time it has reduced work opportunities for unskilled women workers who were the traditional workers in textile, jute, mines etc.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Women from upper caste in rural areas do not engage in out of home wage employment as the state of 'non-work' is linked to the notion of higher status and prestige. The basic elements of women's work within the family are related to division of labour between men and women. There are some caste-based occupations such as smithery, pottery, weaving, leather work etc. where there is well defined sexual divisions of labour.

ii) True, True

Check Your Progress 3

i) Agricultural modernisation and industrialisation have displaced women unskilled workers. For example, in green revolution areas mechanisation of farm operations like weeding, harvesting and threshing etc. have replaced what were primarily women's jobs.

ii) Changes and expansion of women's work opportunities may be brought about through government policies in different sectors of economy and changes in employment share of various sectors. For example, growing need for women doctors, teachers, nurses and functionaries for development programmes will expand women's work opportunities.

UNIT 32 WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Structure

32.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

● describe briefly the nature of gender inequality in education in India

● identify and describe the important reasons for the low educational participation of girls

● analyse shortcomings of the educational system

● discuss alternatives to the formal school.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins with an overview of the educational status of women and the aspect of gender inequality attached to it. We discuss these aspects in section 32.2. Female enrolment and retention in the educational institutions are affected by various factors. A broad description of these factors is given in section 32.3. In section 32.4 we have discussed the familial and social factors affecting women's education. Here we have discussed in detail the factors, like early marriage, *purdah* and other social customs, social and familial expectations and high opportunity cost of education. These factors have affected women's education adversely. In section 32.5 we have examined the limitations of the structures and the delivery systems. In this section, we discuss in detail how distance from homes, inflexible school schedules, absence of women teachers, incentives, buildings and equipment and inadequate childcare facilities have critically affected women's educational status. Content and **ideology** of education in the form of teaching methods and gender biases among teachers, in the textbooks and in the syllabi have also adversely affected women's

education. We discuss these issues in section 32.6. The Government of India has made various efforts for the rapid eradication of illiteracy through non-formal education and adult **literacy** programmes. We have examined these aspects of women's education in section 32.7.

32.2 EDUCATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. Education of women, therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of women in India. However, in India education is constrained by the socio-economic conditions of the people, their attitude, values and culture. During the pre-British era, education was linked to socio-religious institutions, reinforcing a repressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed. The social reformers of the nineteenth century raised the demand for women's education. Since Independence, policy makers have argued for universal education and for making education a tool for bringing about social equality. However, in spite of the efforts made so far the education system has not been able to make sufficient contribution towards women's equality (NPPW 1988).

i) Female Literacy

During 1951 and 1981 women's literacy rate improved from 7.93 percent to 24.82 percent. However, the absolute number of illiterate women shot up from 15.7 million to 241.7 million (excluding Assam) in the same period. If we go further Census reports shows that in 1911, there were 1,055 illiterate women to 1,000 illiterate men, in 1981 the figure for women had gone up to 1,322. The census figures of 1981 showed that women comprised 57 percent of the illiterate population and 70 percent of the non-enrolled children of school stage were girls. The female literacy rate for the year 1991 was 39.28 percent and in 2001 it had become 54.28 percent. In 1991 out of the total illiterates 60.8 percent were women and this rate was higher in the rural area (69.7 percent). And in 2001 out of the total illiterates 64 percent were women. The gap between male-female literacy rates of 18.30 percentage points in 1951 increased to 26.62 percent in 1981. In 1991 this gap was marginally reduced to 24.84 and in 2001 it has gone down to 21.70 percentage points. Figure 32.1 shows the progress of literacy separately for male and female, during 1901-2001.

ii) Regional Variations

Inequality in education between women and men varies region wise. In 1981, in Kerala a state known for its general level of awareness, female literacy was as high as 73 percent, whereas in Rajasthan, one of the nine states officially recognised as being educationally backward, less than 12 percent women were literate. States like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were also lagging behind in girl's education. Again, though the overall female literacy figure according to the 1981 Census was 24.8 percent, in rural areas it was around 18 percent while in the towns and cities women's literacy had gone up to 47.8 percent. Kerala continues to occupy the top spot in female
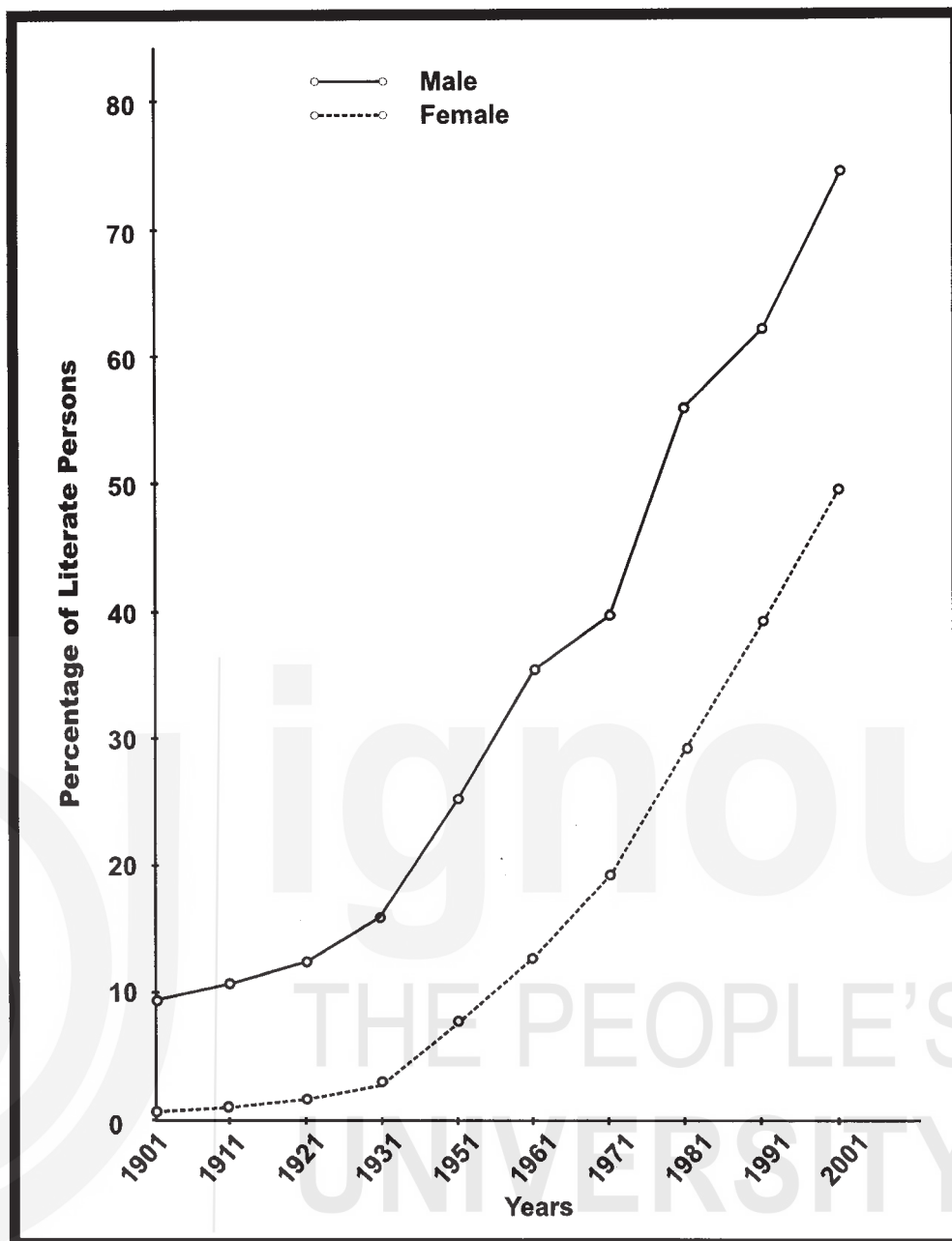
Fig. 32.1: Progress of literacy (1901-2001)

literacy with 87.86 percent even in the year 2001 and Bihar recorded lowest rate (35.57 percent) of female literacy. The States or Union Territories having less than 50 percent literacy rates are Rajasthan (44.34 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (44.24 percent), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (42.99 percent), Uttar Pradesh (42.98 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (41.82 percent) and Jharkhand (33.57 percent). In 2001 the female literacy rate for the rural area was 46.58 percent which was much less than the urban area (72.99 percent). The States with low female literacy rates are shown in the figure 32.2.
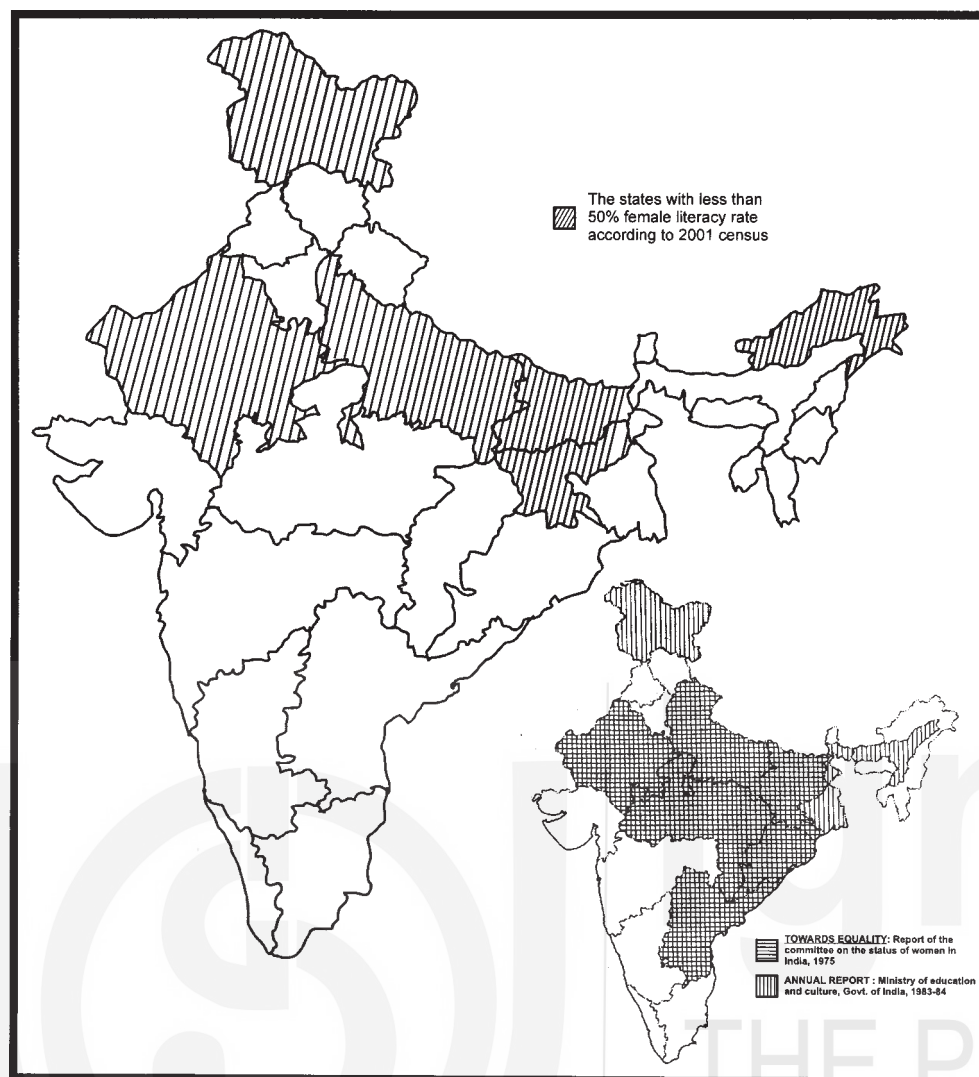
Fig. 32.2: States declared backward in women's education

iii) **Enrolment**

1981 census figures showed that 93.6 percent of the total population in the age group 6-11 years was in school. It is also observed that as all boys at this level were enrolled, universalisation was hindered by the lower participation of girls. It is also true when we look at later data. In the year 1997-98 while the rate of enrolment of the boys was almost cent percent, only 81.2 percent girls were enrolled at the primary level (*Annual Report,* Ministry of Human Resources 1999). However, it is necessary for us to view enrolment targets and figures somewhat critically from three points of view: first, under- and over-age children would account for about 20 percent of total enrolments, in a specific category, thus inflating the actual figure. Second, this set of official figures needs to be compared with the figure of almost 50 million children in the labour force. Even if it is accepted, for purposes of argument, that most working children were from the older age groups, where enrolments were lower, we cannot overlook the existence of a certain percentage of whole-time under-ten year old workers. It would thus be more realistic to keep in mind that actual attendance was in fact much lower. Names may figure on school registers without children ever attending school. Third, in 2005 it is possible that all girls in the 6-11 years age group would be enrolled in school. It is of
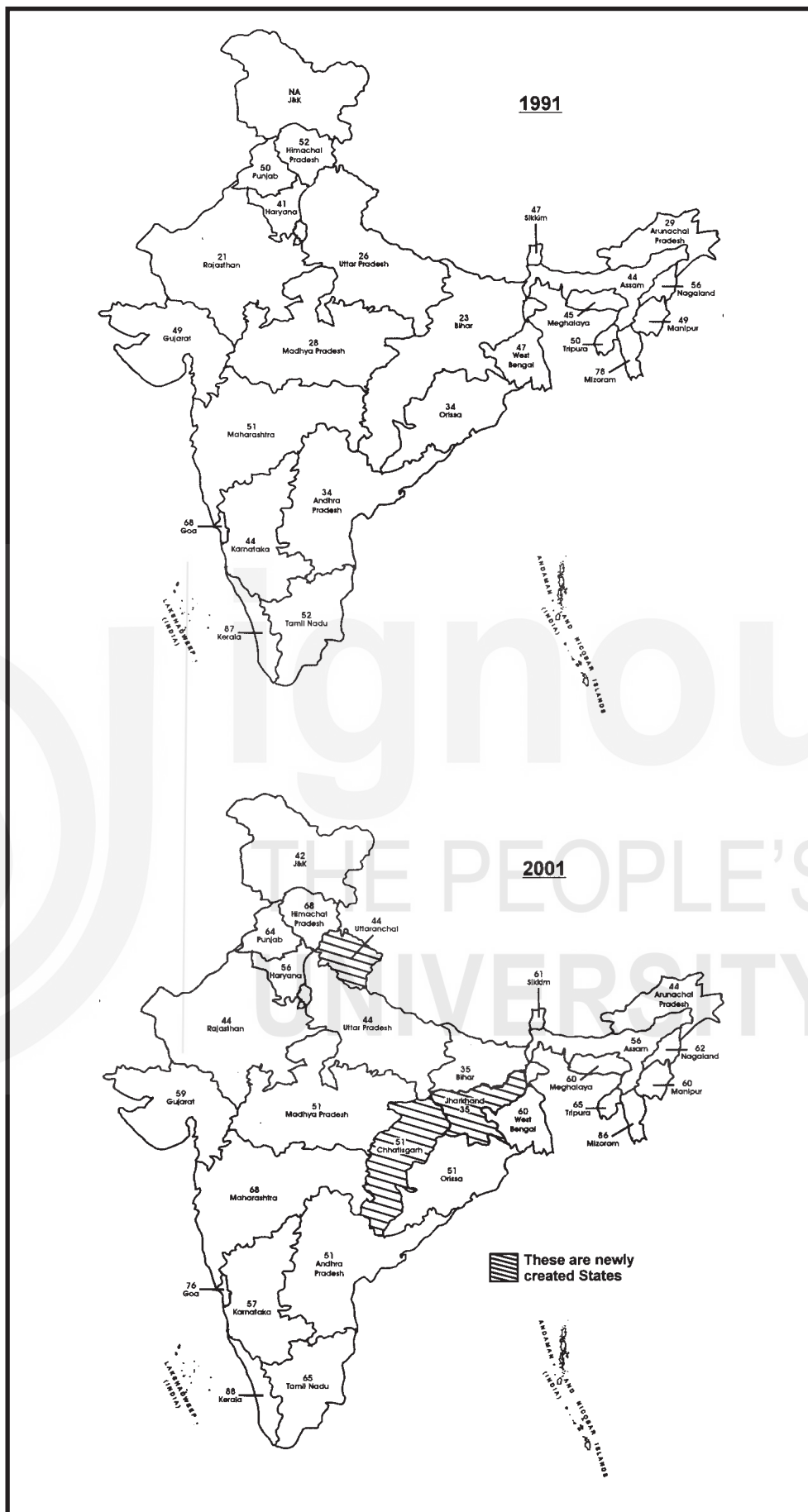
Fig. 32.3 Statewise percetage of female literacy

equal importance to see where these children are going to be in 2010 A.D. Are they still on the school rolls or are they back at work in the fields, homes or in various occupations? In the following sections we shall look at why girls either do not go to school or leave after a few years. Figure 32.3 shows the state wise percentage of female literacy rates in 1991 and 2001.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Write a short note in about four lines on the educational system of the pre-British and British period.

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ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Tick mark T if it is true or F if it is false.

   a)   In 2001 the female literacy rate was lowest in Bihar.   (True/False)

   b)   Women comprised only 25 percent of the illiterate
        population in the year 2001.   (True/False)

32.3   FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE ENROLMENT AND RETENTION

Though various efforts are made to improve girl's enrolment and provide adult education for women, their enrolment in the educational institutions is much lower than that of men. The drop-out rates are significantly higher among the females. Factors affecting enrolment and retention of girls in the educational institutions are many. These can be categorised under three broad headings a) familial and social factors, b) limitations of the structure and delivery systems, and c) content and ideology of education. Before examining these factors in detail let us have a glance at the various aspects of these broad factors given below.

a)   **Familial and Social Factors**

   i)   Family traditions and early marriage

   ii)   Purdah an social customs

   iii)   Social and familial expectations

   iv)   The high opportunity cost of education

b)   **Limitations of Structures and Delivery System**

   i)   Distance of school from homes

   ii)   Inflexible school schedules

iii) Absence of women teachers

iv) Absence of girls' schools

v) Insufficient number of teachers

vi) Insufficient incentives such as scholarships, mid-day meals, free books

vii) Insufficient facilities such as physical structures and equipment

viii) Inadequate childcare facilities.

c) **Content and Ideology of Education**

i) Teaching methods

ii) Biases among teachers and in textbooks and syllabi.

In the following three sub-sections of this unit we shall deal with these factors in detail.

32.3.1 Familial and Social Factors

In this sub-section, we shall discuss the major familial and social factors affecting women's education in general.

i) **Family Traditions and Early Marriage**

By and large, irrespective of socio-economic background, the notion of what it means to be a girl comes into conflict with the ideal of education. For their survival and unity families build on the nurturant and docile aspects of womanliness. These often run counter to a value system which stresses a certain degree of independence of thought, spirit of enquiry, learning by rote, and at a more mundane level, relating to peers and developing non-familial loyalties. While, as shall be seen later, middle class families strike a balance by allowing girls access to certain kinds of courses. Among the large majority, withdrawing a girl from the family's labour force to go to school is viewed as illogical and pointless. The distribution of functions within the household, or what is now known as the gender-based division of labour at home, allots a number of tasks to women and girls. It is seen to be a girl's inherent nature to tend and care for others and not waste time on self-oriented activities such as going to school or playing with friends.

Related to notions of feminity are traditions of early marriage, and *purdah* or the seclusion of women. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (popularly known as the Sarada Act) which was enacted in 1929 and enforced in 1930, fixed the minimum age of marriage for boys at 18 and for girls at 14. The Act was subsequently amended in 1949 and in 1956, raising the minimum age for girls to 18 and that of boys to 21. Yet, a study conducted in late 1980s by the Family Planning Foundation of India found that one crore girls below the age of 11 years were married. Rural women tended to be married by 15, and at a year later in the cities. According to the 1991 census among the currently married women 53.3 percent married below 18 years of age. And as per the National Family Health Survey (1993-94) almost 33 percent women were married by the age of 15.

On "Akha Teej", annually over 50,000 children are married in Rajasthan, many of whom are mere babies. Other studies reported in newspapers from Belgaum district in Karnataka and Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh indicate that child marriages are common in those areas. According to official statistics, of the 4.5 million marriages that take place annually, at least 3 million brides are in the age group of 15-19 years, many of whom come from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. These are also the states where low educational enrolment of girls is coupled with high female and maternal mortality.

ii) *Purdah* **and Social Customs**

By and large, throughout the country, the time span between the onset of puberty and betrothal, if not marriage, is regarded as one of potential danger for sexually vulnerable girls. It is also a phase when girls first experience *purdah* or seclusion as well as restraints on activities within the home during menstruation. The link between a family's *izzat* or honour and control of its women's sexuality results in not only limits on physical activities but also taboos associated with purity and pollution such as regarding women as unclean at specific times. At the same time, girls have to be kept chaste and pure so as to be acceptable in the marriage market. Apart from affecting school enrolments, these constraints and values have led to the acceptance or internalisation of a negative self-image among girls. Such an attitude works counter to the school culture, which should ideally aim at developing healthy competition and a questioning mind.

iii) **Social and Familial Expectations**

Since the nineteenth century, in the West as well as India, whether girls should have access to the same body of knowledge or not has been an area of major ideological and **pedagogic** debate. In the post-Independence period all major Committees and Commissions have concluded that girls should have access to the same kind and extent of education as boys. Nonetheless, it is only a small minority of girls who are free to exercise choices in this vital area. A look at enrolments after class X indicate that girls tend to go into the Arts and Vocational Educational streams in large numbers. What is interesting is that given their results, a far greater number could study Science and Engineering. The fact that they do not is a direct reflection of familial expectations and an internalisation of these expectations. A similar pattern is repeated at the higher education level.

While girls comprise 24 to 50 per cent of those enrolled in higher education in 1981, there were 23 girls to 100 boys in Science courses, and only 6 to a 100 boys in Engineering and Technology courses. By the year 1998 while the percentage of girls who selected science stream for higher education was around 25 percent only, there was an improvement in the percentage of girls who selected engineering and technology courses for higher education. Thus, far fewer girls do, in fact, go in for Science and Technology than would be reasonable to expect from their school-leaving results. Clearly then there are important non-academic factors and situations which influence choices at the age of sixteen or seventeen. These are related to social and familial expectations of what a girl's basic role in life is to be. In the majority of cases, it is assumed that she is to be a good wife and devoted mother, who may, if she has time,

work as a teacher or as a clerk. There seems little point in investing time and energy on a career in science and other related areas. Again, if it is a question of investment of scarce family resources, these are invariably spent on the technical education of a boy. Even if his sister has similar **aptitudes**, she more often than not, redirects them to traditional feminine-oriented courses. Underlying many of these decisions is, of course, a deep-seated conviction that a woman's basic nature equips her to perform better in certain areas than in others. Even when school results point to the contrary, families and indeed girls themselves choose to believe that there can be no true fulfillment in combining too many roles, or in competing to enter male-dominated disciplines. The percentage of faculty-wise enrolment for both men and women is given in the figure 32.4.

A survey of parents, conducted in a private co-educational school in New Delhi, found that 25 percent said that they would not discriminate in role distribution between sons and daughters. On the other hand, work outside the home such as fetching eggs and bread from the market, taking the dog for a walk or running an errand at the neighbours' were regarded as the boy's legitimate area of activity. Thus only 1 percent of the parents expected their sons to help in the kitchen, while 58 percent felt that this was a daughter's function. She was also expected to sweep the floor, dust furniture and wash the occasional dish in many more instances than was the case for a son. Another questionnaire (Parthasarthi 1988) circulated among 66 teachers (44 women and 22 men) indicated that "male teachers display a traditional expectation of role-behaviour from girls, whereas the women teachers believe in a definite personhood being given to girls and ascribe roles to girls that are incongruent
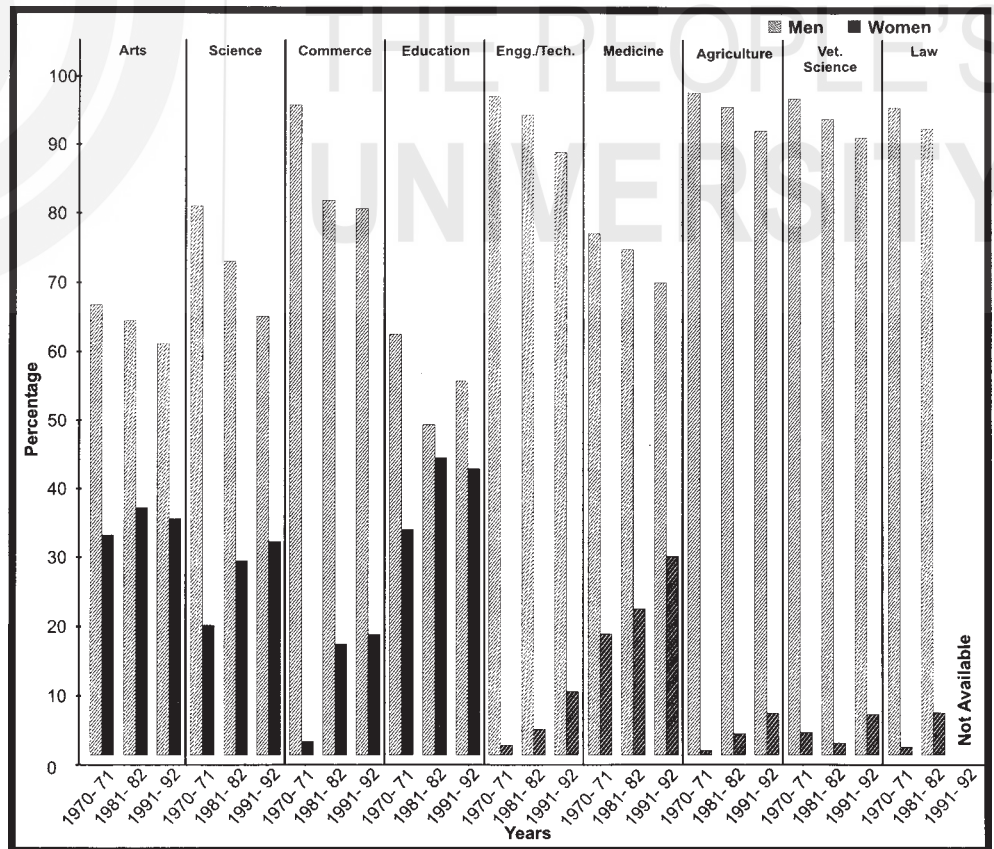
Figure 32.4 : Facultywise enrolement 1970-71 TO 1990-91

with our society's expectations". Interestingly, though teachers of both sexes expected girls to be good at studies, there was greater variance regarding their social role.

iv) **High Opportunity Cost of Education**

You have earlier read about the high opportunity cost of education. Most poor families do not consider it worthwhile to educate their children who can work at home or for a wage. It is clear from the figures on child labour that the existence of poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in school means foregoing the opportunity to earn or help in the home, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms are too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

One of the main areas involving the labour of girls is that of sibling care. While their brothers play marbles or go to school, young girls, either in the villages or in urban slums are initiated early into the maternal role. This releases mothers and older female kin for productive work both within the house and in the wider economy. At present, it is estimated that at least 4.5 crore children need childcare services. Yet, government sponsored schemes and those in the organised sector cover a mere 3 lakh children.

Most working girl children also are in the rural areas (see section 2.3 of unit 31 of this Block). It is estimated that almost half of the women's share in agricultural operations is covered by female child labour. In the Sivakasi match industry, of the 45,000 working children, at least 90 percent are girls below 14 years of age. Girl children work in large numbers in the coir industry in Kerala, and in the home-based production of incense and papads, beedi rolling, gem polishing, and in the making of paper bags, the stitching and embroidering of readymade garments and linen as well as in the assembling of electrical and electronic goods. Again, as is the case with adult women, girls are concentrated in more tiring, monotonous and time-consuming tasks (Burra 1989).

Activity 1

Interview 15 housewives from your neighbourhood. Ask each of them:

i)   age at her marriage

ii)   upto which class has she studied?

iii)   if a drop out, ask why she gave up school or college?

Based on the collected information write a note in about 20 lines stating the manner in which familial and social factors have affected these women's education. If possible, compare your notes with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

32.3.2 Limitations of Structures and Delivery Systems

Women's education has been affected by various non-familial factors, especially by the structure and the delivery system of education. By delivery system we mean availability of education to the population. Let us examine these factors in detail.

i) **Distance of School from Homes:** In a situation where families impose restrictions on girls, particularly after a certain age, easy accessibility to a school is essential to ensure at least a few years' of schooling. Well over 90 percent of the population have access to primary school within a kilometre of the habitation. Yet, the Fifth All-India Educational Survey published in 1989 showed that 32,000 habitations with a population of 300 or more had yet to be provided with primary schools. This figure accounted for 6 percent of habitations with a population of 300 or more. At the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey the rate of habitations having 300 or more population not served by primary school increased slightly to 6.97 percent. As per the government policy, a habitation should have a minimum population of 300 for opening a primary school. The Sixth All India Educational Survey (1997) shows that there were 5,80,590 habitations with a population of 300 or more out of which 93.03 percent habitations have access to primary school facility upto a distance of one kilometre. Out of 6.97 percent (40467) habitations which do not have primary school facility within one kilometre, 2.09 percent did not even have upto two kilometres.

ii) **Inflexible School Schedules:** The existence of daily as well as yearly school time tables which do not take into account the work patterns of households deter the participation of children. It is interesting that though the demand for a more environmentally sensitive school-schedule was mooted first by the Hartog Committee (1929) and has been mentioned often by other Committees and Commissions, the issue has not been given adequate time or thought.

iii) **Absence of Women Teachers:** That the education of girls is substantially dependent on whether they are taught by women or not, has, over the years, been clearly established. From 1983 onwards the Government of India has sponsored a new scheme for financial assistance to encourage the appointment of women teachers in the nine educationally backward states. Yet the supply of women teachers continues to be inadequate for the country's requirement. Despite the fact that teaching is a preferred option for a majority of the middle class working women, only 26 percent of primary school teachers were women in 1981. Interestingly at the middle and secondary school levels, the figure had risen from 15 percent in 1951 to 30 percent in 1981. In 1991 there were only 29 percent women teachers at the primary school level and 33 percent at the middle school and 32 percent at the secondary school level. In 2001 while there was an improvement in the rate of women teachers at the primary and middle level (35 percent and 38 percent respectively), there was no difference at the secondary level (*Annual Repot*, Ministry of Human Resources 2002-03).

iv) **Absence of Girls' Schools:** The issue of co-education versus single sex schools involves certain specific pedagogic principles and points of view. In the Indian context among certain social categories and in parts of the country co-education at any level is unacceptable, and affects girls' enrolment adversely. Though the financial viability of co-educational institutions is undoubtedly much higher than running several single sex institutions with low rates of enrolment, by and large, the present situation

demands segregation as a pre-condition for the mass schooling of girls. Yet, some figures show that the ratio of such institutions to all institutions is only about 10 to 15 percent, when the overall enrolment of girls is approximately 35 percent.

v) Insufficient Number of Teachers: Under the Operation Blackboard (National Policy of Education, 1986) it was stipulated that in primary schools, "at least two teachers, one of whom a woman, should work in every school, the number increasing as early as possible to one teacher per class". Figures from the Fifth All-India Educational Survey indicate that 2,628 schools in the country have no teachers; fifty per cent of these institutions were in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. It is possible that teachers were absent on the day of the Survey; nonetheless, the time lag involved in transfer as well as situations where teachers are unwilling to take up postings in remote areas need to be taken into account. Further, 23.91 percent schools have only one teacher, and most of these are in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Rajasthan. According to the Sixth All India Educational Survey out of the 5,70,455 primary schools in the country 20.12 percent are single teacher schools and another 0.77 percent do not have any teacher at all. There is a decrease in the percentage of single teacher schools since Fifth Survey. The National Educational Policy of 1986 envisaged that each primary school should be provided with two teachers under the Operation Black Board scheme. The aforesaid decrease may be due to the impact of this scheme. The problems of zero teacher and single teacher school are acute in rural areas. There are more than one third of primary schools in Andhra Pradesh (33.49 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (45.46 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (35.26 percent), Meghalaya (37.13 percent) are single teacher schools. Dependence on one individual means that in the event of his or her illness, absence or even transfer, children are left on their own. Again, in such situations parents would be reluctant to expose their daughters to a potentially 'unprotected' environment.

vi) Insufficient Incentives such as Scholarships, Mid-day Meals, Free Books: The midday meal scheme which has been introduced in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa has succeeded in attracting children to school, as well as keeping them on for more years. It is also in these states that the scholarships and free books schemes have been encouraged. As per the Sixth All India Educational Survey, out of the 8,22,486 schools in the country 14.39 percent has provisions for midday meals. And 52.60 percent provide free book facility. Nonetheless, delivery systems are not free from snags. A study of Scheduled Caste children, in 1980s, in the Ballia and Azamgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh found that as supplies of stationery and freeships rarely arrived on time, parents did not have the resources to support their children in the interim period. Further, small fees had to be paid to the teaching staff for transfer and pass certificates known as pass *karahi* fees. In Maharashtra where schooling has been made free for girls, teachers have reported two kinds of responses: while the principal of a rural school in Dhulia district said that enrolments had doubled with free education, the experience from a suburban Bombay school was less positive. Boys now teased girls as being inferior, and similar to the Scheduled Castes, who,

they said, basically studied *phukat* or without paying fees. This negative attitude in a previously more or less egalitarian atmosphere resulted in girls becoming withdrawn and resentful. In both cases the Principals reported that they had discussed at length with their teachers strategies to cope with a not unexpected situation. (based on interaction with school teachers and Principals)

vii) Insufficient Facilities such as Physical Structures and Equipment: Over 90 percent of educational expenditure go to the salaries of teaching and other administrative staff. Consequently, very little is left for buildings and equipment. The Fifth All-India Educational Survey points out that 13.50 percent (71,495) primary schools in the country are without buildings and operated out of thatched huts, tents and open spaces. And this has increased to 14.18 percent at the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey. Another 7.69 percent have no classroom and almost 40 percent have only one classroom. An earlier document showed out that almost 40 percent schools have no blackboards and 54.72 percent have no drinking water. The Sixth All India Educational Survey states that 63.08 percent schools do not have adequate number of class rooms. And 25 percent schools have no black board and 52.59 percent have no drinking water facility.

viii) Inadequate Childcare Facilities: Studies have shown that school enrolments go up when facilities for childcare are available in or near primary schools. Children, in particular girls, can then sit in class knowing that their younger siblings are being taken-care of. However, as we have seen, childcare facilities are very inadequate, and despite recommendations from individuals, groups and committees, the State has yet to take the issue of child minding seriously.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   Mention five limitations of structures and delivery systems affecting women's education.

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ii) Write a note on the opportunity cost of education for a girl child of a poor family. Use about seven lines to answer.

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32.3.3 Content and Ideology of Education

The content and ideology of education has also contributed enormously towards the low educational status of women. In this section we shall be discussing how the teaching methods and sex biases in text book, which form the basis of the content and ideology of education, have affected the educational status of women in India.

i)   **Teaching Methods**

The institution of the school is based on specific norms regarding age at enrolment, sequential promotion on the basis of examinations, teaching from prescribed textbooks within a certain time period and a policy of punishment and reward. These norms assume a certain level of receptivity, awareness and judgment within an age cohort or age group. In most cases, as educational planners and administrators as well as authors of text-books have been and continue to be from middle class urban backgrounds, their assumptions are based on the experience of children from the same environment. In India, where a majority of schools and pupils are in the rural areas, the validity of these premises needs to be re-examined. A lack of imagination and initiative in teaching methods is usually combined with a rigid admissions policy. The single-point entry system which permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age is generally followed in India. In this context, debarring a child merely because he or she is over-aged keeps potential students away from school.

Due to the factors discussed earlier, a number of those who left out are often girls. At the same time, it is true that a 9 year old tribal girl would possibly find it difficult to relate to 6 and 7 year olds in class II. Her sense of **alienation** and feeling different may mean that she would leave school within a few months. The problem can in part be solved by the introduction of multiple-point entries at different ages in specially based on primary schools where teaching is based on using innovative techniques for those with a greater degree of maturity.

ii)   **Biases Among Teachers, in Text Books and in Syllabi**

We find that teacher assessments can be influenced by variables such as caste, class and religious background, as well as sex of the child. Quite apart from the inherent injustice of categorising a child as a low achiever merely because he or she wears torn clothes or is unable to pronounce words with the correct intonation, there is the equally important issue of how the boy or girl reacts to such a situation. It is not unlikely that the 10 year old girl who leaves school to look after her younger brother often does so unwillingly. Her inability to relate to textbooks, which talk about unfamiliar situations in an alien dialect, heightens her sense of inferiority. She feels more at home gathering firewood, chatting to her mother about known experiences and characters and doing jobs she has grown up with. For this young girl the situation is compounded by the fact that textbooks and indeed teachers perpetuate ideas about a woman's basically dependent and inferior status. In so doing the school merely reinforces common familial attitudes towards a girl's, and later woman's role in life. These are particularly relevant

when they influence decisions on subject and career choices of that small minority of girls who qualify to go in for higher education.

Textbook writing often reflects a middle class, urban, male viewpoint. This comes through in the style of writing, choice of subjects and stories. Awareness among textbook writers could result in material, which is sensitive to girls and their dilemmas in a stratified society. We find that irrespective of whether a child studied English or Mathematics, the text can convey ideas on gender equality and justice.

Textbook revision and in-service orientation programmes for teachers have been initiated in several parts of the country, with a view to understanding the issues in girls' education better. Nonetheless, these constructive measures have to contend with a basically conservative teaching force and problems associated with large-scale syllabi and textbook reforms. In addition teachers and educational administrators have genuine problems relating to finishing unwieldy courses within an inflexible time schedule. This results in a somewhat single-minded and unimaginative focus on the content of books encouraging learning by rote.

Activity 2

Interview 15 girls from your locality. Enquire about the major problems faced by them in continuing their studies.

Classify these problems in terms of the familial and social factors, limitations of structure and delivery systems and content and ideology of education. Now write a note on the factors affecting girls' education in contemporary society based on your findings. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

32.4 WOMEN'S EDUCATION THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME

An awareness that the formal school system alone can not solve the problem of illiteracy led to an early expansion of the non-formal education programme. In addition, the need to reach out to adult illiterates with relevant learning schemes was also recognised. The target groups of non-formal education are those children who have to work either for a living or within the home. The underlying assumption of the programme is that when not at work, with the right type of encouragement, children will find their way to functional literacy and non-formal education classes. Though there have not been enough follow-up studies on the impact of non-formal education on girls, there are sufficient indications that this scheme, like all those affecting children who have to combine productive work with other roles, will suffer until the issue of childcare facilities is solved.

i) **The National Adult Education Programme:** The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35

years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, adult education was included as a part of the Minimum Needs Programme and the National Literacy Mission (NLM, 1988) in the beginning has aimed at the eradication of illiteracy in the 15-35 year age group by 1995. When they couldn't reach the objective by the targeted time, they further extended the target. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the goal of National Literacy Mission is to attain full literacy, i.e., a sustainable threshold of 75 percent by 2007 by imparting functional literacy to non-literates in 15-35 years. Out of the 600 districts in the country, 587 districts have been covered by the National Literacy Mission under the literacy programmes. Its focus is to be on women and backward communities living primarily in the rural areas. About 60 percent of participants or beneficiaries are women. These targets continue to be out of tune with reality. Nonetheless, there are indications that well-run programmes may well benefit entire families.

ii) **Few Evidences of Change:** An extensive study in a backward part of Andhra Pradesh shows that an integrated programme of education with basic maternal and child health and nutritional services resulted in a high degree of awareness and receptiveness to modern health practices. Follow up studies on programmes built around women in various stages of pregnancy and early childhood showed that knowledge on nutrition, health and general development through the Mother Child Centres (MCCs) and Functional Literacy Classes (FLITs) has increased considerably. The minor ailments were dealt with more competently and dietary practices of both pregnant women as well as infants appeared to have been influenced by government-run programmes. What is important is receptivity to change.

Organisers of income generating schemes for rural women in Punjab reported that some familiarity with numeracy helps in learning simple counting exercises. While calculating aggregates for a number of days at a time was difficult, women easily learned how to compute their daily earnings. This helped them in dealing with exploitative middlemen as well as with family members who were interested in appropriating most of their earnings. Various alternatives for the advancement of women's educational status is shown in figure 32.5.

iii) **Alternative Schemes:** We find that a major criticism against the adult education programmes for women is that they reflect by and large a middle class world view and rarely take into account the vital role of their client groups in income generation and other productive activities. Such programmes stress the role of home-maker and provide training in conventional areas such as health, nutrition, childcare, home economics, sewing, embroidery and so on. While these are undoubtedly important, it is equally relevant to train such women - most of whom are earners - on how to increase productivity as well as provide information on alternative channels of employment and create awareness of their rights as workers.

Figure 32.5: Women and educational development

These are also areas where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) have provided alternative models and schemes. Two case studies of the *Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram* (KVKA) in Madhya Pradesh and the *Kumaon Mahila Utthan Mandal* (KMUM) in Kausani, Uttar Pradesh, indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. Both are Gandhian organisations, and in Madhya Pradesh the Ashram is the focal point. Attraction to the Ashram led in turn to an involvement with the school, which was perceived as "a place which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures". The centre in Kumaon functions more informally providing *balwadi* services to pre-school children and non-formal programmes for older girls with "little access to primary schools in the hilly areas". All the staff are local persons, and "the daily routine is close to home life ¯ not too 'schoolish' whether it is 'living' or food or other aspects". Both organisations are successful because of community involvement with a **curriculum**, which is relevant and at the same time provides "linkages with mainstream education" (Based on newspaper reports).

i) How 'single point entry' policy affects girls education? Answer in about five lines.

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ii) What is the main objective of the National Adult Education Programme? Use three lines to answer.

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iii) Write a note on the alternative models or schemes of women's education in India in about six lines.

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32.5 LET US SUM UP

We find that within the broader theme of equality of educational opportunity, women and girls' education needs special attention. In this unit, we have discussed that the social environment, attitudes towards women and more specifically, familial expectations limit the nature and extent of girls' education. We have looked at some of the factors responsible for such a situation and at the inter-linkages between the State, society and the individual. You would also have noted growing disillusionment with the existing system; that alternatives are being thought about outside the formal structure is indicative of the desire for change and positive action. It is important to note that such action can easily fall into established patterns of inequality. Educational reform can be meaningful when concerned individuals and organisations work towards influencing attitudes by demonstrating the possibilities of alternatives. Hence, besides analysing the content and ideology of contemporary education, we have also discussed alternatives to the contemporary system.

32.6 KEY WORDS

Alienation   The inability of an individual (or group) to relate to an environment, workplace or even family situation. This is due to situational factors or the individual/group's own misgivings, hesitations and perhaps failures or a combination of both.

Aptitude   To have tendency or flare in a particular area. For instance, pupils are put into different streams (Arts, Science) on the basis of their aptitudes, which are reflected in their examination results.

Curriculum   Course of study; extra and co-curricular activities such as games, music, theatre, when these are not a part of the formal curriculum

Ideology   The beliefs, attitudes, opinions that guide and direct a system, political party, group, family or individual

Literacy   It is defined as the acquisition of the basic skills of reading and writing, through the formal school system or non-formal learning.

Pedagogy   Methods of teaching particularly through the formal system of education

32.7 FURTHER READING

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Deem, Rosemary 1978. *Women and Schooling.* Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.

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Indiresan, Jaya 2002. *Education for Women's empowerment: Gender Positive Initiatives in Pace Setting Women's Colleges.* Konark: New Delhi

Karlekar, Malavika 1983. "*Education and Inequality*" in Andre Beteille (ed) *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice.* Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Shukla, Suresh Chandra and Krishna Kumar, 1985. *Sociological Perspective in Education.* Chanakya: New Delhi.

32.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   During the pre-British era, education was linked to the socio-religious institutions, reinforcing an oppressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed.

ii) a) True   b) False

Check Your Progress 2

i)   a) Inflexible school schedules

b) Absence of women teachers

c) Absence of girl's school

d) Distance of school from home

e) Insufficient number of teachers

ii) The existence of the poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in the school means forgoing the opportunity to earn or to help the family, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms is too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   In India, a vast majority of the schools and pupils are in the rural areas. The single point entry system permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age. In this context, debarring a child because he or she is over-age, keeps potential students away from school. Hence, the majority of those left-outs are often girls.

ii) It was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35 years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years.

iii) Non-governmental organisations and voluntary agencies have provided alternative models and schemes. These indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. The community participation led to an involvement with the school that was seen as a place, which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures.

UNIT 33 CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ISSUES: HEALTH AND LEGAL ASPECTS

Structure

33.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to

- state and explain the concept and content of women's issues

- describe aspects of women's health as an important dimension in contemporary women's issues

- describe the legal status of women.

33.1 INTRODUCTION

You will find that this unit begins with a brief discussion on the concept of women's issues. Here we shall describe women as a social category, analyse the nature of their issues, and the aspects related to the emergence of women's studies. There are a series of women's issues in terms of low access to productive resources, medical facilities, educational and employment opportunities and various other social and economic discriminations faced by them. In the earlier

units of this Block we discussed some of the important issues like education, work and employment and the socio-cultural conditions which are responsible for the discrimination against women in the society. The latent discontent of women has been manifested in the form of women's movements in various parts of the country in the last few decades. We have discussed this aspect in unit 30. Issues pertaining to women's health and legal status have emerged as crucial in the contemporary women's movement. In the section on women's health we have looked at the causes of low female sex ratio, the problems of early marriage and pregnancy. In the section on women's legal status we have reviewed the laws related to marriage, age at marriage, dowry, divorce, property and inheritance, sati and violence against women. We have examined some legal measures related to work, sex determination test and indecent representation of women. Lastly, we have tried to understand the problems related to the implementation of these laws and have suggested the ways for better legal status of women in society.

33.2 WOMEN'S ISSUES: CONCEPT AND CONTENT

This section introduces you to the concept of women's issues and their content. Besides these, we shall also be dealing with the aspects pertaining to the emergence of women's studies.

33.2.1 The Concept of Women's Issues

Women form an important social category. The basis of this category is not simply the biological entity but also the socio-cultural construct. Social status and roles of women are defined not only in terms of the gender dimension but also in terms of the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs of the society. Women as a social category cut across the boundary of caste, class, race, estate etc. social groupings. Please keep it in mind that women do not form a homogeneous category. They belong to diversified socio-economic groups and are also divided in terms of spatial considerations like rural and urban. However, women are frequently an especially oppressed group within each unit of socio-economic stratification (Agarwal 1983: 1).

The concept of women's issues does not pertain to women alone because it neither exclusively belongs to the domain of women nor is it totally an outcome of injustices meted out to women by men. In our society, we find several instances in our religious traditions, which relegate women to an inferior status in comparison to men. However, we cannot simplify women's issue as a conflict between men and women, or the women's movements as a crusade against men. Indeed, these issues are an outcome of the prevailing social system. The norms, values, customs and old socialisation processes govern each member of society, over generations to form his/her attitudes and behavioural patterns. Similarly, these also formulate expectations of each member of society. The structural arrangement of the society provides women low position. They are economically exploited and discriminated, socially subjugated and politically rendered a powerless group in the society. Women's issues are thus perceived to be linked to social issues. These issues are especially focussed on women's unequal access to productive resources,

decision-making bodies, health care facilities, education, employment opportunities and social justice. In this respect, the study of women's issues needs to be incorporated within the discussion of wider social issues, concerning the rights of underprivileged sections of society.

33.2.2 Gender Role Stereotyping and Women's Issues

The institutional arrangements, the values, norms and customs of the society create and sustain female role stereotypes. For example, within this socio-cultural set up, with the concept of marriage as the true destiny of a woman and with her important obligation to bear a son, the roles of wife and mother emerge as proper to women (CSWI, 1974). Hence, by eulogising her motherhood, religion binds a woman to the home and to her role of creating and nurturing children (Anklesaria, 1985: 141).

Women play crucial roles both in the productive and reproductive activities. However, in the process of rapid economic development and social change women's contributions have remained invisible and unrecognised within the given process of role stereotyping and traditional role expectations. Women have been subjected to marginality in all realms of life. In the earlier units, of this Block (especially unit 29), we have discussed how traditional concepts of role and status generate gender role stereotype and expectations of women affecting women's status adversely in society. While these issues have remained in the society since the ages, these have come into sharp focus only in the latter half of 1970s with the resurgence of women's movements and women's studies. In unit 30, we discussed women's movement. Here let us have some idea on the emergence of women's studies.

33.2.3 Emergence of Women's Studies

The interest in women's studies spurted during the 1960s in the West, with the emergence of a broad heterogeneous women's protest movements.

In India, the area of women studies emerged in 1980s. It was in the seventies that, after the United Nation's General Assembly Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1967), and the subsequent UN request to its member states to submit report on the status of women in their countries, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up. The Committee submitted its report in 1974 (Mazumdar 1983: 24). Again in response to the U.N. Call for Action (1975) and on the basis of the findings of the CSWI report, the Government of India has drawn up a Draft National Plan of Action for Women. The Plan accords priority to the need of purposive research in "education, health, welfare and employment of women with special emphasis to the weaker section of women whose conditions have most adversely affected the process of social change" (ICSSR 1975: 7). The ICSSR has recognised the status of women as the priority area of research. The University Grant Commission (UGC) has also opened Women's Studies Centres in some Universities all over the country. Besides the ICSSR and UGC, various research organisations and Universities, like Centre for Women's Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, SNDT University have also taken women issues as the focal point of their study.

In India a large body of literature has emerged on women studies since the 1980s. These have covered various aspects including their social status,

economic roles in agriculture, industry and plantation, political participation in the national movement, peasant movements and industrial unrest. Some recent studies have also touched upon their legal and medical status. Besides the social science studies various national committees and commissions have also produced important reports stating the status of women in contemporary Indian society. The most important of these have been that of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974, National Commission on Self-Employed Women, 1988, National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988, National Commission for Women, 1992 etc.

While the social scientists, policy planners and the media generated enormous data on women's issues in India, since late nineteen seventies there have emerged numerous women's organisations in various parts of the country. These organisations have made their presence felt through various mass mobilisations and protests against women's discrimination in the society. Since the beginning of 1980s there has been increasing awareness among the women, both in the rural and urban areas, though in varying degrees. They have raised the issues related to the socio-economic injustice faced by them in the society. With the growing awareness women's issues have came into sharp focus in literature, media, discussion and policy formulation. Hence, women's health and legal status have emerged to be crucial contemporary women's issues in India. In the following sections we shall be discussing these issues in detail.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What do you mean by women's issues? Answer in six lines.

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ii) Write a note on the priority of research as accorded by the National Plan of Action for Women. Use four lines for your answer.

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33.3 WOMEN AND HEALTH

In India, within the given socio-cultural matrix women get low access to medical care. Women belonging to the low strata of the socio-economic hierarchy and to the rural areas have been the critical manifestation of this aspect. Women's health is affected by a series of interrelated economic and

socio-cultural factors, viz. levels of earnings and educational background, and "the attitudes to marriage, age of marriage, value attached to fertility and sex of the child, the pattern of family organisations and the ideal role demanded of Women by social conventions" (Government of India 1988: 97). Hence we are to examine the question of women's health within the given context.

In this section we shall be examining some of the important features of women's health-status in India.

33.3.1 Sex-ratio and Life Expectancy

Sex-ratio (number of female per 1,000 male) is an important indicator of women's status in the society. The census figures show that while the female population has increased from 117 millions in 1901 to 329 millions in 1981 and 495 million in 2001, the number of females per thousand males is steadily declining. In 1901, there were 972 females per 1,000 males, while by 1971, the ratio had come down to 930 females per 1,000 males. In 1981 there has been only a nominal increase in the female sex-ratio with 934 females to 1,000 males. It has further declined to 927 in 1991. And it has gone slightly up in 2001 to 933.

Similarly, though life expectancy has increased for both the sexes, the gap between the two is widening. In 1921 the expectation of life for both males and females was 26 years. By 1961-71, the male life expectancy increased to 47.1 years, while that of females to 45.6 years only. Life expectancy has increased over the decade from 44.7 years in 1971 to 54.7 in 1980 for women. It was estimated to be slightly higher in 1980 for women than men: 54.7 and 54.1 years at birth respectively. During 1995-2000 the life expectancy for women and men were 64.9 and 61.9 respectively. However, age specific death rates indicate higher mortality for female children and women for every five year period till 35 years of age (Government of India 1988: 97). The low female sex-ratio and the life expectancy of the female are partly due to differential sex-ratio of newly born infants and partly due to high female mortality rate. Female mortality is to a great extent due to neglect during early childhood, death during childbirth and infant mortality. Let us discuss these aspects briefly.

i)   **Neglect During Early Childhood**

The neglect of the girl child starts very early in life. The extent of neglect varies from family to family depending on their economic position. But in comparison to her male counterpart a female child is relatively neglected in most of the socio-economic strata. Throughout the country it has been noticed that when the girl child depends on breast feeding the chances of her survival are relatively more. Data from various sources shows that from infancy till the age of fifteen the death rate far exceeds the mortality rate of male child. There are several causes underlying this. Firstly, the female children are-breast fed for a far shorter period than their male counterparts. Secondly, during illness parents show a greater concern towards male children. This neglect is quite often enforced by poor economic condition. Finally, in addition to the intake of insufficient and non-nutritious food the female child is exposed to a greater workload very early in life. Often in families of weaker economic strength the girl child is found attending the household chores as well as taking care of her younger brothers and sisters.

ii) **Death during Childbirth**

Early marriages expose women to longer child bearing period. This means greater health hazards to women and children. Several studies show that teenaged mothers' risk to health for both themselves and their children. This risk is further enhanced by poor nutrition. Various surveys indicate that women's caloric content is about 100 calories (per women per day) less than they expend, whereas men show an 800 caloric surplus intake. Women expend a great deal of energy working inside and outside the house, whereas they often have insufficient food. Customarily they often eat after the men and other members of the family have eaten. This is especially true in joint families in both urban and rural areas. This results in complications due to incorrect methods of delivery. Besides these, lack of knowledge and improper care during post natal period, and frequent pregnancies lead to larger foetal wastage, birth of larger number of low weight babies, and death of young women.

iii) **Female Infanticide and Foetal Killing**

This refers to killing the infant soon after its birth or at the foetus stage. The former is common amongst certain tribes and caste groups such as the Kallars of Tamil Nadu. The Kallars live in abject poverty. For livelihood they work in illicit liquor distilleries and coconut groves. Which require more male hands. The birth of a daughter is burden for them for not only there's insufficient occupation for her, but dowry has to be given for her wedding and other gifts to be given to her husbands family on various occasions after the solemnisation of the marriage.

Foetal killing has been a crucial problem in some urban areas. A medical diagnostic process called, amniocentesis, is used in the U.S.A. to check possible deformities of the unborn child. However, this is fast being used by parents to select the sex of their child. Misuse of the sex determination test has been a crucial issue in some urban places in India. This has resulted in a new type femicide i.e., abortion of female foetuses. A survey carried out in Bombay during 1984 revealed that out of 8,000 abortions 7,999 were female foetuses (Government of India 1988: 98). It is reported that in Dharampuri district of Tamil Nadu, the place where female infant mortality rate as per 1991 census was 100.1, 105 female infants were killed every month in 1997. Testing for sex determination of the unborn child has been now banned in India. The causes and concerns of women's health hazards are shown in figure 33.1.

33.3.2 Early Marriage and Women's Health

Early marriage affects women's health status adversely. A vast number of girls are married at the teenage. According to the 1991 census among the currently married women 53.3 percent married below 18 years of age. And as per the National Family Health Survey (1993-94) almost 33 percent women were married by the age of 15. It leads to teenage pregnancy and various physiological problems. In 1981, 7 percent of the girls in the age group of 10-14 and 43 percent in the age group of 15-19 were married (Government of India 1988). Thus, 50 percent of the girls is introduced to the sexual life and to the reproduction processes at the teenage. Because of malnutrition, over-burden of work, illiteracy, ignorance of the sex-behaviour these pregnant girls take high risk of life. Around 10 to 15 percent of the annual births are from these adolescent mothers. However, most of their babies suffer from malnutrition, under weight, and risk of mortality.

Figure 33.1 Women and health

33.3.3 Pregnancy and Women's Health

In India, women have on an average 8-9 pregnancies and they spend around 80 percent of their reproductive years in pregnancy and lactation. Study shows that in the low income group pregnant women have deficiency of 1,100 calories and lactating women 1,000 calories. Women of the lower socio-economic groups gain only around 3-5 kilograms during pregnancy which is far less than the required weight. Anaemia in pregnancy accounts directly 15 to 20 percent of all maternal deaths in India. The maternal-mortality according to official report is 400 to 500 per 1,00,000 births. However, this figure is as high as 1,000 to 1,200 in some rural areas. Again, more than 71 percent and 29 percent of the deliveries in the rural and urban areas took place without trained personnel (Government of India 1988).

In most of the rural areas, Medical Termination of Pregnancy services are not available. Besides, women are not aware about the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 that has made abortion legal. Hence, illegal abortions by incompetent persons continue, resulting in abortion-related mortality and morbidity as serious problems (Government of India 1988).

Check Your Progress 2

Tick mark the correct answers of the following question.

i)   Which one of the following is a reason for female mortality?

a)   Neglect of female during early childhood

b) Death during childbirth

c) Infant mortality

d) All of the above

ii) Which one of the following is a cause of high risk to the life of the adolescent mothers?

a) Malnutrition

b) Over-burden of work

c) Illiteracy

d) All of the above

33.4 WOMEN AND LAW

Women's access to legal equality has been one of serious concerns of the women's movement. During the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century, the movements for women's rights in India centered around the major problems of infant marriages, widowhood and property rights for women. During the freedom struggle and the discussion on Indian Constitution the major debate on women's legal equality centered around the Hindu Code Bill. The debate recognises that "women are not accepted as man's social, economic or political equals and that the discriminations can be effectively reduced, if not eliminated by passing appropriate laws and evolving an effective machinery to implement those laws. And so, after Independence we have the phase of legal reform, progressive, bold, legislative initiatives, which translated constitutional commitments and guarantees into laws to help improve women's legal status" (Government of India 1988: 135).

In the post-Independence period many laws were enacted with the objective of improving the social status of women and ending discrimination and oppression against women. In the following sub-section we shall be examining some of these laws.

33.4.1 Marriage, Dowry and Divorce

In this sub-section we shall discuss some of the major laws relating to marriage, dowry and divorce. In independent India significant laws and amendments to the existing laws have been introduced in these areas.

i) **Marriage**

In traditional India, the institution of **polygyny** where a man could take more than one wife at the same time, was widely prevalent. It is only in the last few decades that polygyny is steadily on the decline. The Government of India has banned polygamy for all the government servants. Monogamy has been accepted in the laws of all other religions except Islam. Muslim law regards marriage as a contract where the husband has the right to have more than one wife and children through other wives. He also has the right to divorce his first wife without having to pay any compensation to her.

This gives rise to a growing sense of insecurity for the wife and the children, who not only have to live at the mercy of the husband and father respectively, but can also be rendered destitute on divorce. Divorce can be obtained among the Muslims by the mere utterance of the term '*talak*' thrice by the husband.

The Supreme Court has upheld Muslim Women's right to receive maintenance allowance from her former husband but this does not invalidate the very act of polygyny, as it does not stand legally wrong. According to the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), it is important to ban polygyny in order to establish social justice and equality for Muslim women. The Committee observed that "full equality of sexes can hardly be possible in a legal system which permits polygamy and a social system which tolerates it. The only personal law, which has remained impervious to the changing trend from polygamy to monogamy, is Muslim law. We are of the firm view that there cannot be any compromise on the basic policy of monogamy being the rule for all communities in India. Any compromise in this regard will only perpetuate the existing inequalities in the status of women".

ii) **Age at Marriage**

To curb the practice of getting girls married even before they have attained puberty, the Sarda Act or Child Marriage Restraint Act was introduced in 1929, which fixed the age at marriage for girls to 15 years. This Act applied to all the communities. This was later revised in 1954 when the Special Marriage Act was passed which fixed minimum age of marriage at 21 years for males and 18 years for females. However, investigations show that quite often marriages of the girls are fixed below 18 years.

There are prejudices and certain beliefs underlying this preference for child marriage, especially among rural and backward communities. Dominant is the popular notion of the woman's role defined in terms of marriage, child bearing and rearing and taking care of all other domestic activities. Thus women are regarded as dependent beings who would ultimately move from the father's house to the husband's house. This largely explains the parent's reluctance in sending girl children for formal education. Instead they tutor the girl child to handle all domestic chores which are to benefit her after marriage.

Added to these above reasons is the loophole in our legislation, which while penalising the performance of child marriage on one hand, recognises the marriage itself is valid (ICSSR 1975: 43).

iii) **Dowry**

At the beginning of the 1980s, due to spurt in the incidents of deaths of young married women reported as "dowry victims" there has been an increasing concern of many voluntary organisations to raise their voice in protest against the issue of dowry. They have pressurised the government to take strong action against the practice of dowry. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was amended in 1984 and again in 1986 to make the provision of this law more stringent. Under this law court now has powers to act on its own knowledge or on a complaint by any recognised welfare organisation. The offence has been made cognisable for the purpose of investigation. A new section on dowry-murder is added in Indian Penal Code (IPC). The Indian Evidence Act amended to shift the burden of proof to the husband and his family where dowry is

demanded and the bride dies within 7 years of the marriage otherwise than under normal circumstances. This amendment has also made provision for the appointment of Dowry Prohibition Officers and Advisory Committee to look after the issues pertaining to dowry (Government of India 1988). Anti-dowry cells are also established in some important urban centres to tackle this issue effectively.

iv) **Divorce**

The personal laws clearly discriminate between the husband's and the wife's rights to seek divorce. In the Christian law the husband can seek divorce if the wife has committed adultery. But the wife has to prove a second offence along with adultery (incest, bigamy, cruelty, desertion) in order to obtain a divorce. Similarly, the Muslim law grants absolute power to the husband to dissolve the marriage at his will. The wife on the other hand could seek dissolution only if

a) it's a divorce on mutual consent.

b) divorce by agreement on the wife's giving some consideration to the husband ;

c) divorce where the husband delegates.

The Muslim women are also not given any compensation besides the trivial *mehr* or dowry amount. However, the Muslim personal law granted the right to women to keep their children till the age of seven, after the custody cases are decided. But as these cases are dragged on for a long time it became very difficult for the Muslim women and never get the right to keep their children.

However, quite often these laws are not implemented because of sheer ignorance of a majority of the women of their rights to divorce, maintenance and adoption.

It is important to mention here that women and men of all religious communities have the choice of getting married under Special marriage Act, 1954. It has more equitable provisions for marriage and divorce. However, society looks down upon a divorced woman as the 'culprit' while man is able to remarry without a stigma. Moreover, most women suffer from lack of education and economic independence and are left in a desperate situation after divorce.

We need to take a note of the amendment in the Hindu Marriage Act as well as the Special Marriage Act in December 2003. It eases the restrictions on judicial jurisdiction in matrimonial matters. Earlier the wife and the husband could file matrimonial proceedings only where they last resided together or where their marriage had been solomnised. The latest amendment allows one to file a case in the family court of one's current place of residence.

33.4.2 Property and Inheritance

Women are relegated to a secondary status in terms of property and inheritance. The Hindu Laws as well as the Indian Succession Act, 1925, which applies to all minority communities, grant women only negligible ownership rights.

i) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 was introduced in place of the *Mitakshara* and the *Dayabhaga* Schools that had governed Hindu Succession rights for a long time. The position of women was one of the

dependence with barely any proprietary rights. The Act of 1956, brought radical changes in the pattern of succession, the most important being equal rights for male and female heirs. But this was later codified in the face of resistance and a power structure was laid down which excluded women from exercising direct control over family assets. The Act makes discrimination between unmarried, married and widowed daughters. It grants residence rights only to unmarried and widowed daughters or daughters whose husbands have deserted them. Thus immovable property in the form of house and land remains under the direct control of males. This is further supported by the virilocal pattern of residence where women are expected to leave their natal home to reside in their husband's home after marriage. This practice levels credibility to control property by male members in order to avoid partition of property. In addition, strong **filial ties** restrain a woman from dragging her brother to the court of laws. On the other hand, in her husband's house too, the woman does not have direct control over his land and property. This makes her the ultimate loser.

Interestingly, at the level of the central government, there are indications of support from some significant elements within the State and initiated measures towards reforming Hindu inheritance laws in a gender equal direction. But these initiatives remained low key due to the lack of adequate local mobilisation by the civil society (Agarwal,Bina 2002).

ii) Amongst the Muslims too, the son gets two-thirds of the property whereas the daughter gets only one-third. If a man dies leaving only his daughter she gets only half of his estate. The rest goes to distant **kindreds**. The widows face the worst. If a husband dies without a child, she gets only one fourth of the property. If there are children then she gets only one-eighth.

iii) Among the Christian community if a husband dies without making a will, his widow is entitled to only one-third or Rs. 5000 of his property. The rest is shared by his lineal male descendants, i.e., his father's brother or his sons. If he dies leaving no **lineal descendants**, but has kindred, only half his property goes to the widow. The distant relatives can claim the rest.

The Christian law is complicated by the non-applicability of this law in certain areas For instance, the Travancore High Court has upheld that the Indian Succession Act should not apply to Christians of Kerala. The Travancore Succession Act governs Christians in Travancore other than Protestants and Latin Catholics. Similarly, the Cochin Christian Succession Act governs Christians in the former Cochin State but not the Anglo Indian or Tamil Christians.

iv) Among the Parsis too a son's share to his father's property is twice that of the daughters. If a woman predeceases her husband, her son is entitled to an equal share of the mother's property along with the daughter, but the daughter is not entitled to the same rights when she inherits the property of the father.

33.4.3 Work, Remuneration and Maternity Benefits

According to the Equal Remuneration Act, 1973, men and women are to be paid equally for doing the same or similar work. This Act also forbids discrimination on the basis of sex at the time of recruitment and after. However, this Act is not applicable to the unorganised sector where the bulk of the women work.

The Maternity Benefit Act, l961 provides for the maternity leave to women working in the factories, mines, plantations and in the government and semi-government establishments. Provisions are also made for the crèches to care for the children of women working as contract labourers under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979,

33.4.4 Crime against Women

There are various forms of crime against women. Sometimes, it begins even before their birth, sometimes in the adulthood and other phases of life. Let us examine some of the important laws introduced for eradication of crime against women.

i) **Sati**

So far we have seen that in the Indian society, the position of women is always perceived in relation to the man, from birth onwards and at every stage of life, she is dependent on him. This perception has given birth to various social customs and practices. One important manifestation of these customs and practices has been that of Sati. It is seen as a pinnacle of achievement for a woman. This custom of self-immolation of the widow on her husband's pyre was an age-old practice in some parts of the country, which received deification. The popular belief ran that the goddess enters into the body of the woman who resolves to become a sati.

The practice of sati has been abolished by law with the initiative of Raja Rammohan Roy in the early decades of nineteenth century. However, there has been a significant revival of the practice of sati in the last few decades. Indeed, Rajasthan has been the focal point for this practice in recent years.

India has witnessed a strong social reaction in the form of organised agitation in the late 1980s against sati following the burning of the young educated Roop Kanwar on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala, Rajasthan. In response to the public demand the Parliament passed the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987. This law declares the practice of sati unlawful and "any act towards such commission shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may be extended to six months or with fine or with both...." The Act also prescribes the maximum punishment for the abetment of the commission of sati, to equate it with murder rather than abetment of suicide, as has been done in the earlier cases of sati. The Act also makes glorification of the practice of sati an offence and goes a long way in refuting the myth that sati is a manifestation of the glory of Hindu Women (Government of India 1988: 137-138).

ii) Violence against Women

Violence against women both inside and outside of their home has been a crucial issue in the contemporary Indian society. To respond to the growing incidence of violence against women the Parliament amended the Criminal Law Act, 1983. This amendment gives legal recognition to the domestic violence by making cruelty inflicted by the husband or his relatives an offence. Again the Indian Evidence Act has also been suitably amended to provide that if a married woman commits suicide within seven years of her marriage the assumption in law will be that her husband or his relatives abetted the suicide.

Based on the 84th Report of the Law Commission on Rape and Allied offences the government amended the Criminal Law Act in 1983. This amendment prescribed the protection of the rape victim from the glare of publicity during investigation and trial. It also introduced change in the definition of rape to remove the element of consent. It also enhanced the punishment for this crime (Government of India 1988).

Activity 1

In recent years there has been increasing number of violence against women. Prepare a list of violence against women based on the report of the newspaper or radio or T.V. or any other mass media. Also write down the types of legal measures initiated against these violences. Now based on these collected information, write a note in about 25 lines on the "Violence against women and legal measures in contemporary India". Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

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a) Sex Determination Test

You have learnt above the misuse of sex determination test in section 33.3.1 of this unit and also in unit 29 of this Block. Now let us have an idea on the laws related to the foetal killing in India. According to Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 abortion is legal in India. Again the Government of Maharashtra has gone far ahead by passing the Maharashtra Regulation of use of Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1988. This law has made prenatal sex determination test illegal in Maharashtra. Government of India passed the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (regulation and prevention of misuse) Act in 1994. It was proposed to prohibit pre-natal diagnostic techniques for the determination of sex of foetus leading to foetal infanticide. This Act was again amended in 2001. The government of Tamil Nadu passed a similar law in 1996.

b) Indecent Representation of Women

Indecent representation of women in the media has been a crucial issue in India. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 has been passed by the Parliament. This law seeks to ban 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 regatory to, or denigrating women or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals" (Government of India 1988).

33.4.5 Problems related to the Implementation of Law

In India, various progressive laws (see figure 32.2) have been passed and significant amendments have been introduced to the existing laws for women's emancipation. However, within the existing values and norms of the society many of the progressive laws have not got the scope of full expression. The CSWI report points out that certain "pend provisions in the law are definitely influenced by the established patriarchal system, the dominant position of the husband and the social and economic background of women" (CSWI, 1974).
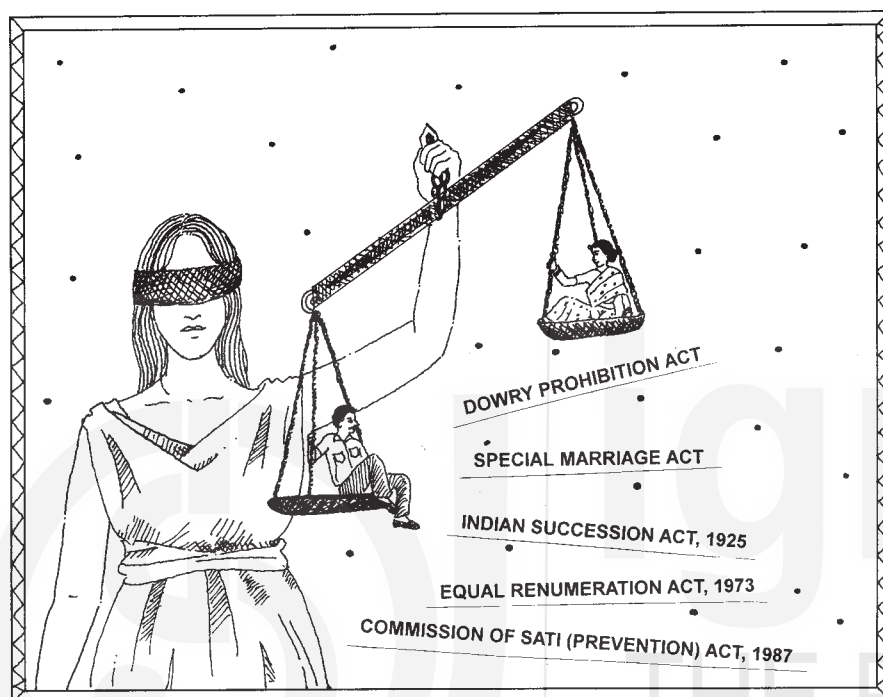

Figure 33.2: Women and law

Again, there are several loopholes and gender biases in the existing laws. For example, the personal laws pertaining to marriage provides a provision for restitution of conjugal rights and this is equally available to the husband and wife. However, in most of the cases, it is used by the husband against the wife ignoring the fundamental rights of the latter.

On the one hand, women have been subjected to discriminatory traditional norms and values and gender biases and on the other, a vast number of them have remained unaware about the significant provisions of the laws. Hence, there is a great need to educate women about the legal provisions and to make specific provisions for free legal aid to women. The NPPW observes:

"'Legal aid programmes for women have to be developed which are not litigation oriented. These must consist of:

i)   creating legal awareness amongst the people and especially women,

ii)   holding local aid camps ...,

iii)   conducting para-legal training programmes for social workers and voluntary agencies, and

iv)   supporting public interest litigation, by which social workers can participate and carry forward the legal aid programmes for women" (Government of India 1988: 144).

Check Your Progress 3

i)   Write a note on the CSWI observation on the practice of polygyny in India. Use four lines for your answer.

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ii) Write a note on anti-dowry legislations in about seven lines.

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iii) Tick mark the correct answer of the following question.

In which sector does the Equal Remuneration Act, 1973 stipulate the equal remuneration for man and women doing the same kind of work?

a)   The organised sector

b)   The unorganised sector

c)   Both in organised and unorganised sectors

d)   None of the sectors

33.5   LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed women as a social category and the concept of women's issues at the very out-set. We have examined the role and status of women within the given socio-cultural context and the emergence of women's studies. Women's health and legal status are important contemporary women's issues. In the section on women's health we reviewed the causes of women's low sex-ratio, and the health problems related to early marriage and pregnancy. In the section on law we discussed women's legal status in terms of various laws enacted in India related to marriage, dowry, divorce, inheritance, practice of sati, violence against women, work and remuneration and indecent representation of women's body. We have looked briefly at some of the problems related to the implementation of these laws.

33.6 KEY WORDS

Filial ties   Relationship between the parent and their children.

Kindred   Relatives of both sides - consanguine and affinal.

Lineal descendant   Members of the same descent group.

Polygyny   A form of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife at the same time.

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33.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) Women's issues are perceived to be linked with the social issues. These issues are specifically focussed on women's unequal access to the productive resources, decision-making bodies, health facilities, educational opportunities and social justice. In this respect, the study of women's issues needs to be incorporated within the discussion of wider social issues, concerning the rights of underprivileged sections of the society.

ii) The Plan accords priority to the need of purposive research in education, health, welfare and employment of women with special emphasis to the weaker sections of women whose conditions have been most adversely affected by the process of social change.

Check Your Progress 2

i) d

ii) d

Check Your Progress 3

i) The Committee observed that full equality of sexes could hardly be possible in a legal system, which permits polygamy, and a social system, which tolerates it. The committee strongly suggested that monogamy should be the rule for all communities in India.

ii) Under the present form of the Dowry Prohibition Act the court has been given power to act on its own knowledge or on a complaint by any recognised welfare organisation. A section on dowry murder has been added in Indian Penal Code (IPC). Again the Indian Evidence Act is amended to shift the burden of proof, to the husband and his family where dowry is demanded and the bride dies within 7 years of the marriage otherwise than under normal circumstances.

iii) a

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