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,
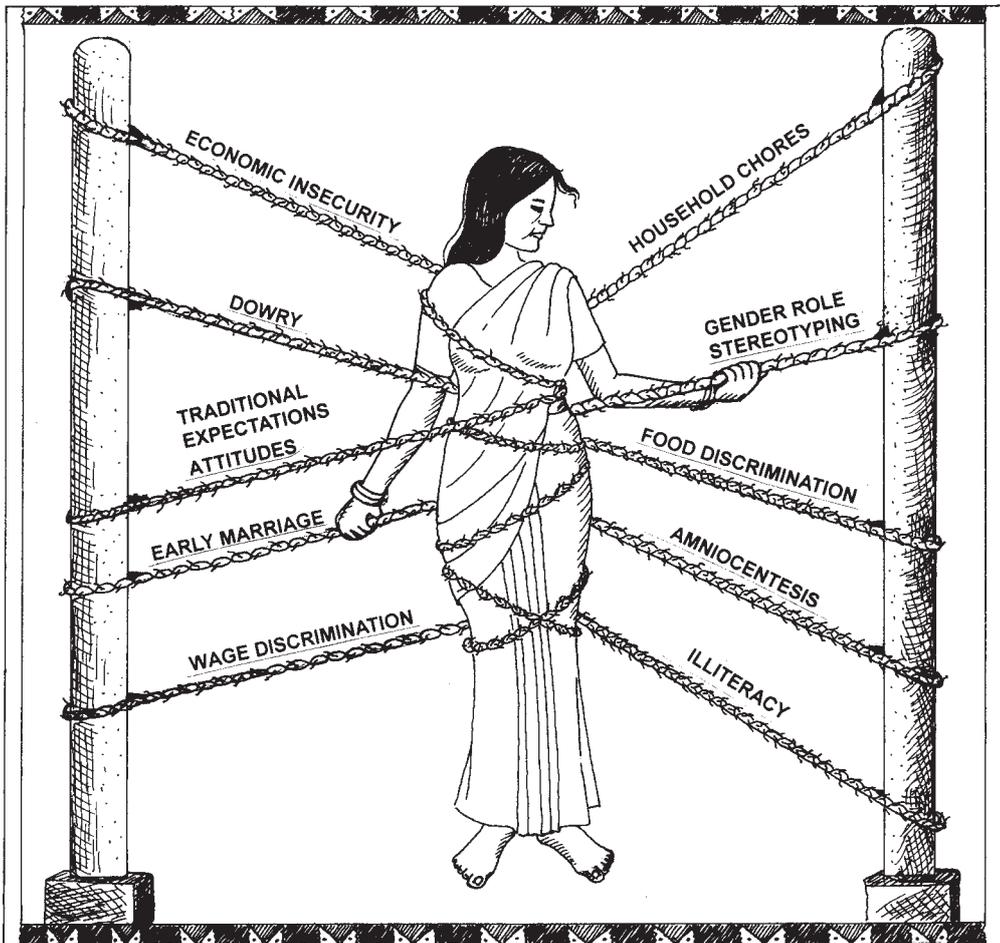

Figure 29.1 Status of women in India

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.

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.