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## PROBLEMS OF WOMEN

**H**uman life is full of problems. But, do you think that women face many more problems in their day-to-day life both in their families and society at large. In Lesson Gender discrimination and Gender equality you saw how gender discrimination creates several problems for women. A problem can be defined as a condition, which is a source of trouble, discomfort or inconvenience for a person. It is also a situation which comes in the way of a person exercising his or her choices in life and enjoying the rights conferred on him or her by the Constitution or law.

There are certain problems which are faced both by men and women. For example, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy or ill health. But there are a few problems which are faced exclusively by women because of gender discrimination prevalent in different social institutions. Prominent examples are female foeticide, female infanticide, domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment at work place and society at large, and widowhood. These problems are the result of violence meted out against women in different social institutions

### OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the problems, which women in Indian society have to face in their day to-day life;
- identify the factors, which are responsible for the problems women face;
- feel the intensity (*seriousness*) of problems such as female foeticide, female infanticide and other forms of domestic violence;

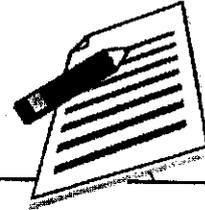
- see what serious proportions dowry is assuming in India and think of the means combat (*fight*) this menace;
- analyse the different forms of sexual harassment and its impact on victims and
- develop concerns for the problems faced by widows and identify ways of dealing with these problems.

We will now start taking up each of these problems for a detailed discussion.

### **34.1 FEMALE FOETICIDE**

Did you know that discrimination against women starts even before they are born? Though the Constitution of India has conferred equal rights upon women and men and has specifically prohibited any form of discrimination based on sex, many female infants do not even have the chance to be born? Every year thousands and thousands of female infants are killed while they are still in the mother's womb. By using medical tests such as scanning it is possible to detect the sex of the unborn foetus. With the help of doctors and para-medical staff, some parents resort to the inhuman practice of aborting female foetuses. The killing of female foetuses is known as female foeticide. It is true that the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act was introduced in the year 1971, in India and as per its provisions; abortion was permitted under medically approved conditions. However, this Act definitely did not give the freedom to misuse its provisions to abort only female foetuses. To begin with, facilities to identify the sex of the unborn child were available only in big hospitals in cities, such as Delhi or Chandigarh, but over a period of time Sex Determination Clinics were opened in different parts of the country. A television feature on female foeticide revealed that in Maharashtra there were villages without drinking water, but facilities for conducting sex determination tests and aborting female foetuses were available. Often, the tests were conducted under most unhealthy and unhygienic conditions and yet, parents and families went ahead and got rid of their 'unborn daughters.'

Why do parents kill their unborn daughters? They justify their actions by saying that a daughter would bring an enormous amount of financial burden in future, as they have to pay dowry to get her married and, hence they would rather not allow her to be born. In the male dominated family set up prevailing in India, the expenditure on a daughter's marriage is generally borne entirely by her parents. This expenditure is in addition to the gifts or cash, they are expected to hand over to the son-in-law in the form of dowry. Also, dowry is not just a one time demand or payment. Both in rich and poor households dowry is being cited as the single most important cause of female foeticide. Many women argue that since they did not want their daughters to suffer the kind of humiliation they themselves experienced, they decided to abort the unborn female foetuses. Is it not surprising that women



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themselves lend their bodies for such an inhuman act like sex determination or foeticide? But how many women have the choice to refuse? Economic compulsions, total dependence on the husband or his family or the absence of a security system, which would protect women even if she decided to escape from this oppression, often force women to give their consent for aborting their female foetuses. More than anything else, there is no fear of punishment either for the medical personnel involved or the parents. Though an Act banning sex selection tests known as The Pre-natal Diagnostic Technique Act (PNDT) was passed in 1994. Till date, there has not been an effective implementation of this Act. So much so that neither medical practitioner nor parent has been punished. The law enforcing machinery is often aware of the identity of hospitals and clinics, which conduct these tests, but no action is initiated. As a result, the practice flourishes unchecked. Today, you may not find advertisements in local trains, which openly provoke and promote sex selection tests, by saying 'Spend rupees 500 now or 50,000 later', but sex determination clinics flourish in many parts of India and carry on their business without any sense of a serious threat.

If killing of female foetuses is one form of violence committed against women, the other face of this violence is female infanticide, which is the practice of killing female infants immediately after they are born.

### 34.2 FEMALE INFANTICIDE

There is a widely prevalent belief in our society that female infanticide was an inhuman practice, which was in existence only in ancient times. But the merciless killings of newly born female infants taking place in different parts of the country have shown us that female infanticide is not a forgotten incident of a bygone age, but very much a present reality. While several thousands of female infants are killed even before they are born, thousands and thousands of others are murdered immediately after their birth. This practice is more common among poor households, because, for killing a foetus financial resources are required, but a newborn infant can be killed by stuffing poisonous food grains, through strangulation or suffocation. Media has reported on the wide-spread prevalence of female infanticide in some regions of Tamilnadu, Bihar and Rajasthan. Yet, to this day the practice has not been checked. There are police outposts in most of the regions, but they have done precious little to check its occurrence. Has any parent been punished for an act, which is nothing short of murder?

If parents have to reach a stage, where they can kill an unborn foetus or a newborn child, what could be the reason? Is it poverty alone or are there other reasons? In our society, which is male dominated, for centuries, preference has been given to male children because there is a belief that a son not only carries the family's name



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forward but will also provide the security and shelter needed by his parents in their old age. Since a majority of Indian families are *patrilocal* (a system of residence where a woman, upon marriage moves to her husband's house) and *patrilineal* (a system of inheritance where property is transferred in the male line) many families are reluctant to spend money on a daughter's future development. Their argument is that resources spent on a daughter's upbringing actually bring no returns in terms of economic rewards. So economic consideration carry an important weight in decisions to kill female foetuses or infants. You will be surprised to know that even in many rich families female foetuses or infants are killed because they do not want the property to be taken out of the family in the form of dowry. This is especially true of families with large land holdings. We have already read in the previous two lessons that a female is always viewed as lesser than a male. Her status is lower. She is seen as a daughter, wife or mother of a male rather than an individual with an independent identity of her own. These kinds of attitudes form a low value syndrome around the female sex, which works towards perpetuating such practices as female infanticide.

Have you ever thought about the fact that female foeticide and infanticide are among the major causes for a reduction in this country's female population? Child sex ratios (children in the age group 0-6 years) have declined so sharply during the last 10 years that today there are only 927 girls per 1000 boys, as against 945 per 1000 in 1991. If this menace is not stopped, in the years to come, millions of girls will disappear from our midst.

**Where are the Missing Millions?**

- It is estimated that in India, every year 3 million girls disappear from our midst. This includes female children who are killed before their birth or immediately after they are born. Preference for sons has created a sex ratio, which indicates a gradual decline in the proportion of female population. This adverse sex ratio is also known as the phenomenon of *Missing Millions*. **Serious punishment must be given to persons who are responsible for such acts as female foeticide and female infanticide. Also, it is very important to improve the living standards of poor households and provide them enough resources to educate and empower their daughters and not end their lives. An awareness campaign aimed at driving home the consequences of female foeticide and female infanticide on the health and well being of individuals, families and society must be constantly carried out through different agencies of the media such as television, radio, movies and newspapers.**



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**INTEXT QUESTIONS 34.1**

Fill in the Blanks:

1. The Act of banning Sex Selection Tests was passed in India in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The act of killing a female child before it is born is called \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The number of female children per 1,000 male children in the age group 0-6 years is called \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The constant decline in the number of females in the country's population is explained by using the term \_\_\_\_\_.

**34.3 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

What is domestic violence?

Violence against women can occur either within their households or outside. Family is considered the safest place for its members, but this illusion has been proved wrong by the experiences of women who face the threat of violence in their own homes. The term 'domestic violence' refers to destructive acts which cause physical injury or harm to a woman in her household. The term domestic violence is generally used to refer to physical abuse, but it should also include deprivations, which members of a family may experience, through not necessarily physical abuse. Look at this example, and you will understand, what I am trying to convey. A daughter who is not sent to school and forcibly confined to domestic work or denied nutritious food, while sons receive the best of food, best of education and all other facilities for development. In the above instance, there may be no physical abuse involved, but the fact that a girl child is prevented from enjoying the rights conferred on her is also a form of violence.

It is shocking but true that about 30 per cent of the crimes against women are committed within the household. Domestic violence includes such acts as wife battering, subjecting daughters to physical abuse, harassment for dowry, which may result in dowry death and forcibly confining women to the house. Domestic violence is surrounded by a culture of silence because, what goes on inside the home is generally considered 'private'. Even when women are being assaulted or tortured in their homes, the neighborhood's attitude is generally one of disinterestedness or, non-interference in some one else's personal life. On many occasions, even the police treat cases of domestic violence as personal quarrels and fail or even refuse to take action. It is only when continued victimization results



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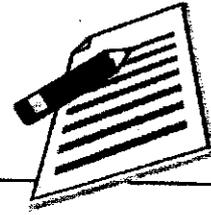
in murder, suicide or grievous physical injury that society wakes up. But by then the damage is already done.

Look at this case of Asha, who was being subjected to physical harassment every day by her parents-in-law, husband and his sisters. The cause for this ill treatment was dowry demand. The neighbours were fully aware of what was happening to Asha, but they did not interfere or inform the police. One night, Asha was set on fire and it was only when her screams were heard that the neighbourhood choose to act. By the time the police and Asha's parents came on the scene, Asha had sustained burns all over her body and lay unconscious. They had arrived too late. Asha's parents were inconsolable. They felt extremely guilty that whenever their daughter pleaded with them to take her away from this oppressive family atmosphere, they had convinced her that a wife's place was in her husband's home and that matters would settle soon. The case of Asha is not an isolated incident. Scores of women have fallen a prey to domestic violence and yet, physical and mental abuse of women in their conjugal/marital families continues unchecked.

In most families men and women do not enjoy the same amount of power. This is the single most important cause of domestic violence. Even when women, who are economically self-sufficient are not free to take independent decisions, one can imagine the situations of women who are dependent on their husbands. It is socially acceptable that within the household, the male is the master and the woman, the subordinate partner. Often, social pressures force women to tolerate abuse in order to safeguard family honour. It is also true that support services for women, such as shelter homes, or security centres are very few and hence women find it difficult to escape from an oppressive family atmosphere. With little support either from within or outside their family circles domestic violence remains a major threat to women.

### How could domestic violence be countered?

- First and foremost, cases of domestic abuse must be treated as crimes against women and not as a 'personal matter' between the residents of the household.
- Women must learn to bring the existence of violence to the notice of their parents, friends, women's organizations and the police.
- Tolerating violence in the name of safeguarding family honour will not help matters, but will only aggravate the situation.
- The law enforcing agencies must play an activists' role in countering cases of domestic violence.
- Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code was introduced with the intention of preventing harassment of married women for dowry.



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- However, provisions under the Act can be applied in situations of domestic violence and marital cruelty as well.
- There is no specific law to deal with domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Prevention Bill is still waiting to be cleared by the Parliament.

What is needed is the will to apply the provisions of the existing law to cases of domestic violence and punish the guilty.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 34.2

Choose the Correct Answer

1. When a wife is beaten by her husband in her household it is best known as:
  - (a) Sexual abuse
  - (b) Domestic Violence
  - (c) Crime against a woman
  - (d) Marital Conflict
2. The Domestic Violence Bill is waiting to be cleared by:
  - (a) Parliament
  - (b) National Human Rights Commission
  - (c) National Commission for Women
  - (d) Department of Women and Child Development
3. Domestic violence accounts for \_\_\_\_\_ % of the crimes against women.
  - (a) 45
  - (b) 43
  - (c) 30
  - (d) 59
4. Which among the following is the most effective way of condemning domestic violence?
  - (a) Family Quarrel
  - (b) Police Torture
  - (c) Breaking ties with the family
  - (d) Neighbourhood action

### 34.4 DOWRY

How did the practice of dowry start?

In a Hindu marriage a bride is given away by her parents to the bridegroom. This ritual is called *Kanyadaana*. The word *daana* stands for an act of handing over something to another person or an institution. In the case of a marriage, it is the bride or a *kanya* who is handed over. The sacred texts have laid down that a *daana*, which is not accompanied by *dakshina*, is incomplete. The word *dakshina*



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is generally interpreted to mean an offering in the form of cash. *Dakshina* could well be a token amount of even a rupee. It is a mark of honour to receive *daana* and *dakshina*. At the same time, it is viewed to bring religious merit to the one giving a *daana*. Gradually, the amount of *dakshina* came to be used to forge marital links with grooms of higher caste and status. And over a period of time, this practice came to be misused and turned into a demand, which is put forth by a bridegroom for accepting a bride. Cutting across religions and castes dowry demands increased. To justify their action, those who supported dowry argued that the system had religious sanctions. This is, however, not true. No religion would approve of such excesses.

### 34.5 WHAT IS DOWRY?

Dowry refers to the gifts given in cash or kind to the bridegroom or/and his family by the parents of a girl during her marriage. Dowry is most often a demand placed by a man or his family as a pre-condition to the marriage. The amount or the type of dowry to be given is mostly decided at the time of fixing a marriage. Most families consider marriage to be the ultimate goal of a woman's life. They are ready to go to any extent to get their daughter married off, even if it comes to selling their hard earned possessions, and along with it, their self-respect.

#### Is there a difference between dowry and gift?

When a parent voluntarily hands over cash or an item to his or her daughter before, at the time of or after her marriage it cannot be equated with dowry. It is viewed as a gift and is also termed *streedhana*. The intention of giving this gift may be to help the daughter have a support to fall back upon in times of need or crisis. This was exactly the intention with which *streedhana* was being given to a daughter in many communities during earlier times.

A gift remains a gift only when the daughter has the rights of ownership over it. If her husband or his family takes control over the gift by force, it ceases to be a gift and takes the form of dowry. It is also true that many families try to cover up the truth that they have given dowry to the son-in-law by saying that it is a gift given to their daughter out of their own free will. This disguised form of dowry is resorted to for fulfilling the crucial social, religious and emotional obligation of marrying off one's daughter. Dowry is also viewed as a substitute for a daughter's share in parental property.

Realizing the menace of dowry, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act in the year 1961. The Act had defined dowry as 'property given in consideration of marriage and as a condition of the marriage taking place.' Both





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giving and receiving dowry were considered offences under the Act, but it was a non-cognizable (*an offence, which cannot be punished under the provisions of the law*) and bailable (*an offence for, which a suspect can be given bail*) offence, which carried a maximum punishment of six months and / or a fine of Rupees five thousand. As a consequences of further pressure mounted by the women's movement the Dowry Prohibition Act was amended in 1984, and the words 'as consideration of marriage' were replaced by the words 'in connection with marriage'. The punishment was increased to a minimum period of five years and a fine of up to Rupees ten thousand, or the value of the dowry, which ever was more. The one-year limitation, which was imposed by the 1961 Act for filing a complaint, was removed and it was now made possible for the girls' parents, relatives or a social work institution to file a complaint on her behalf. Another clause in the Act of 1961 that prior sanction of the government was necessary for prosecuting a husband, who had demanded dowry was also dropped by the 1984 Amendment.

The Act was again amended in the year 1986. The amendment which was aimed at making the Act even more stringent increased the penalty to Rupees 15,000 and shifted the burden of proof to the accused. The amendment also made any unnatural death of a woman within seven years of marriage punishable under section 304 of the Indian Penal Code.

Do you now see how strict the law has turned? Under these circumstances, the number of dowry deaths should be declining. You will be surprised to know that today more women are falling victims to dowry related harassment than ever before. Today, in India every two hours, there is a dowry death. Dowry is now turning into a life-long demand. Grooms demand anything from cash, jewellery, house, vehicles, air tickets to go abroad and business capital to a wide variety of consumer goods. Growing consumerism and an unending greed for easy money, without having to work for it are also responsible for increase in dowry demands today. In the male dominated family set up, it is almost always the bride's parents who bear the entire marriage expenses and when this is coupled with dowry, the financial burden on the family goes on mounting.

After all this is given, do you think parents find their daughter happy? She is continuously tortured to bring more dowry. If she fails to do that, she may be beaten, humiliated or even killed. Hoping that their daughter will be happy, parents may go on yielding to the dowry demand? But how long? Do they not have other responsibilities? So they start avoiding their daughter or advise her to put up with the harassment. It is only when the daughter is dead or killed that parents realize that they have made a mistake.

Though there is wide publicity being given to dowry related violence, the practice



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has not been checked. In spite of stringent laws, very few who are responsible for killing innocent girls and women are actually punished. Many parents and their daughters surrender without any protest to dowry demands because of the irrestable customs under which they live. Even law enforcing authorities are most often not free from patriarchal values. With the exception of a few cases, which are taken to their logical end, in most instances of dowry related violence no action is taken. This indeed is a very sad reflection on our social values. In a society, where we take so much pride in the respect we give to women, how can we ever justify an inhuman practice like dowry? It is high time that we all wake up to fight this social evil.



*An Anti-dowry demonstration*

ACTIVITY 1. Have you witnessed an incident of dowry harassment or dowry death in your neighbourhood? Write your experience in 20 sentences.

ACTIVITY 2. Visit a women's organization, which fights for dowry victims and have an interaction with the members. Record your experience in 20 sentences.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 34.3

State whether the following statements are True or False:

1. The Dowry Prohibition Act was first passed in the year 1962.  
True                      False
2. The 1986 Amendment to the Dowry Prohibition Act made any unnatural death of a woman within seven years of marriage punishable by law.  
True                      False
3. Dowry can be equated with a gift.  
True                      False

4. As per the provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act, those who give dowry are also liable for punishment.

True • False



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### 34.6 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment takes many forms. A woman can be harassed sexually in her work place, home, street or in any place. In the section that follows, we will discuss two glaring forms of sexual harassment, viz., *Rape* and *Sexual Harassment at Work Place*.

#### 34.6.1 Rape

Rape is an act which involves forcible sexual intercourse with a woman against her will. Having sexual intercourse with a minor girl with or without her consent or with a woman under threat are also considered acts of rape.

What are the causes for rape? For centuries, in all societies, sexual harassment has been used as a weapon to suppress and subjugate women. Since women live in constant fear that their bodies might be attacked, subjecting that body for attacks is an easy means of blocking a woman's progress. Also, rape is used as an instrument of revenge by men. The object of revenge may be the woman herself, her family or male relatives or the group to which she belongs. Instances of gang rape of women by upper caste men, feudal landlords and political leaders or their agents are very common.

Have you heard of Bhanwari Devi, a social worker from Rajasthan? She was fighting against child marriage in her village and, in doing so she attracted the anger of upper caste landlords. She was gang raped by five men in the presence of her husband when they were working on their agricultural land. Though she lodged a complaint and named the persons who had raped her, the local police and court did not initiate any action. Bhanwari Devi's case went up to the sessions court in Jaipur and do you know what the court said 'It is impossible to believe that men in the age group 50-60 years, that too upper caste men can rape a Dalit woman'. But Bhanwari Devi is a very courageous woman and she is still fighting for justice with the support of women's organizations.

Cases of rape are increasing at an alarming rate in recent times. It is shocking but true that many women, who have gone to police stations to lodge complaints have been raped by the police themselves. The case of Mathura, a 16 year old tribal girl who was raped by two policemen in the station (*custodial rape*) created a uproar and brought forth wide spread protests from women's groups and activists from



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all walks of life. Increasing religious fundamentalism has also been the source of many communal conflicts and when religious fanatics set out on a mass rampage, women are generally targeted for sexual assaults. Can you believe that even the family, which is considered a 'safe heaven', is not 'so safe'? There have been instances of rape of adolescent girls by male relatives in the domain of the household.

Rape causes not only bodily damage but also severe physical pain and psychological problems. Rape victims suffer both short term and long-term injuries. If a rape victim happens to be a child or an adolescent (*can you believe that even infants have been raped*) she may not even be able to understand what is happening to her or resist it. Incidents of sexual abuse in childhood can cause problems in adult life. Child victims of rape, like adults have difficulty in forming inter personal relationships. The effects of the psychological torture undergone can be long lasting and sometimes stay throughout a victim's lifetime.

The increasing incidence of rape is sending shockwaves throughout the country. But how do you combat rape? The first rape law in India was passed in the year 1860. For 123 years, that is, till 1983 the law remained unchanged. The law against rape was heavily biased against women. Until it was amended in 1983, it was left to the victim herself to prove 'beyond all reasonable doubt' that she had not consented to sexual intercourse. The only proof, which was accepted by the court, was one of serious physical injury. In the Mathura rape case, the policemen who were responsible were acquitted, but this judgement brought forth widespread protests and demand for changes in the rape law. The 1983 amendment was a response to these protests and two significant changes were brought forth in the rape law. These were:

- i) The inclusion of custodial rape as an offense.  
and
- ii) Awarding a minimum of 7 years imprisonment for offenders, and for persons found guilty of custodial rape, gang rape, rape of pregnant women and girls below 12 years of age, and a minimum of 10 years imprisonment.

In a landmark judgement delivered in 1983 the court also held that additional corroboration of a rape victim's testimony was not required. The court added that, in the circumstances prevailing in Indian society, refusal to act on the testimony of the victim was adding insult to injury. The Indian Evidence (*amendment*) Bill 2002 amending the original Act of 1872 deleted two clauses, which show that the victim of rape or attempted rape is of generally immoral character.

The 1983 amendment, no doubt brought elements of judicial activism [judiciary

playing the role of an activist who will bring to a victim, the justice, which she actually deserves] into the rape law, but even today, a large number of rape cases go either unreported or unpunished. The strong social stigma attached to rape and the tendency to fix responsibility on the woman for a rape incident hold many women back from lodging complaints or pursuing the case. A progressive judiciary as well as police force can go a long way in not only punishing offenders, but also checking the incidence of rape in our society. The public on their part must also come forward to condemn inhuman acts such as rape.



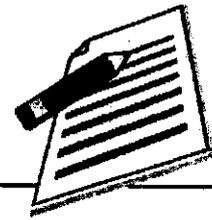
*Demonstration against rape*

Rape poses a serious challenge to women's empowerment. The fear or threat of rape keeps many girls and women from aspiring for or achieving social mobility. Parents may also use this as a convenient tool for discouraging their daughters from the pursuit of higher goals in life. The quest for gender equality can not make any headway, if sexual abuse of women continues unchecked.

### 34.6.2 Sexual Harassment at Work Place

While rape is a very visible form of sexual atrocity on a woman, there is a form of sexual abuse, which went totally undetected and uncared for, until recently. This refers to the violence, which women face in their work place, be it an office or an agricultural field. For centuries, women have been subject to overt or covert physical abuse in their work places, but either because of the absence of a legal forum through which they could protest, or because of economic compulsions, which forced them to put up with abuse, most women either ignored or tolerated sexual abuse by male colleagues, superiors, customers or employers. Also, was prevalent a social attitude, which seemed to expect women not to complain if they wanted to work outside their home. The extreme reaction to sexual abuse in the work place was that a woman should not come out to work, if she is so conscious of her honour. What a way to treat a serious matter?

It was only in 1997 that the women of this country finally found a platform to



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complain about and seek justice in cases of sexual harassment at work place. In *Vishaka vs. The State of Rajasthan*, the Supreme Court of India pronounced its judgment, which to this day serves as the basis for fighting cases of sexual harassment at workplace. The judgment identified the following five types of behaviour in the work place as cases of sexual harassment:

- Physical contact or advancing in such a manner as to suggest sexual contact.
- Coercion or request for sexual favours.
- Use of sexist language.
- Displaying pornographic literature.
- Any physical or oral act, which includes unwanted sexual elements.

The Supreme Court also directed all employers, be it in the organized sector or un-organized sector to appoint a committee against sexual harassment at work place. It is binding on this committee to enquire into complaints registered and also to initiate action against those responsible for acts of sexual harassment. However, even to this day many organizations have neither set up these committees nor are most women employees aware of their rights. It is also true that many cases fall apart, for want of proper evidence. However, what brings us satisfaction is that a grave offence like sexual harassment at work place can now be dealt with under the provisions of law and that, those affected can seek justice.

### 34.7 WIDOWHOOD

In the traditional social system, widowhood was considered a curse and widows did not enjoy any status either in the family or society at large. A widow was considered impure, and a dark spot on the family honour. Widows lived in virtual physical and social isolation and since they had no right of 'remarriage', their future was virtually doomed. It was only in the year 1856, that due to the efforts of the great social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar that the British government passed the Widow Remarriage Act, which gave legal sanction to widow marriage. However, the position of widows did not change drastically nor did society easily accept the concept in principle or practice. But, over a period of time social attitudes towards widows have changed.

The social stigma attached to widowhood has declined considerably and it is heartening to see an increasing number of widows, especially in the younger age group being able to re-marry. This, however, does not mean that all their problems have been solved or that all widows are able to find marital partners or social

approval for marriage. It is also possible that out of choice, a widow may remain single.

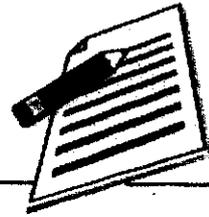
When a widow is economically dependent, there is scope for exploitation by her own family members. Reluctance to share family property or refusal to take responsibility for her maintenance may be the cause for this exploitation. Also, in these days of nuclearization of households, many widows may be left to fend for themselves, and if they do not have the necessary resources, survival itself becomes a problem. Improved access to health care and increasing life expectancy give a clear indication that in future the number of older women will be on the rise and that many of them will be widows living alone. The absence of social security measures for them, on the one hand and decreasing family support on the other are going to be the major problems, which many widows will be facing in future.

It is true that in big cities and even in some small towns Senior Citizen Support Services are being established by private or voluntary agencies. These institutions provide board, lodge, health care facilities and other amenities, but financial resources are required to obtain the benefit of these services and a large number of widows are not in a position to raise these resources. Where services are being offered free of charges, conditions may not always be conducive for leading a wholesome life. The government has introduced many schemes for supporting elderly women, but given the magnitude of the problem, the schemes are woefully inadequate. By merely sanctioning widow pensions, free bus or train passes the problem is not solved. The fact that the largest chunk of widow population is in the rural areas needs to be taken note of. It is possible to use their knowledge and experience to create services such as community kitchens, community child support services or self-help groups. Through these services, not only can widows empower themselves, but also younger women and girls in the neighbourhood. The problem of widows needs to be understood and tackled from a holistic perspective, and it is only then that realistic solutions will emerge.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 34.4

Answer the following questions in one sentence

1. When was the first rape law passed in India?
2. What is custodial rape?
3. Name the case, which was responsible for the judgement relating to Sexual Harassment at Work Place?



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4. When was the Widow Remarriage Act passed?

**ACTIVITY 3 - Visit an old age home in your neighbourhood and talk to the widows, who are inmates of this home. Based on your interactions with them write a brief note of 350 words about their problems. (The Study Centre has to take care of this 'Learning through Activity' exercise. This should be a Teacher Marked Assignment)**



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Women face many problems in their day-to-day life both within and outside their household.
- The major problems, which have a negative impact on the status of women in Indian society, are female foeticide, female infanticide, domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment and widowhood.
- Due to such practices as female foeticide and female infanticide, there is a gradual decline in the number of female children in the age-group 0-6 years.
- Even though home is considered a very safe place, women are subject to many forms of violence such as wife beating, denial of basic rights, dowry harassment or death and forcible confinement at home.
- Domestic violence accounts for about 30 per cent of the crimes against women in India.
- Since domestic violence is committed within the household, it is generally treated as a family quarrel or misunderstanding.
- Absence of security homes or safe shelters force many women to continue to live in an oppressive family atmosphere.
- Though the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961 and amended in 1984 and 1986, cases of dowry related violence are on the rise.
- Rape, which is an act of forcible sexual intercourse with a woman, is an offence punishable with a minimum of 7 years imprisonment. If it is a case of custodial rape, gang rape or rape of a pregnant woman or a girl below 12 years of age, the minimum period of punishment is 10 years.
- Violence, which women face at their work place is called sexual harassment at work place. This is punishable as per the provisions of a judgement delivered by the Supreme Court in 1997.
- There is a definite change in the condition of widows during recent times, but those widows without adequate economic and social support still face problems.



- Rigid implementation of laws, a change of heart and provision of social and economic securities to women are sure ways by which their problems can be solved to a great extent.



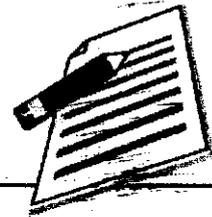
**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

Answer the following questions in 200-300 words.

1. Define female foeticide and female infanticide and explain their causes.
2. What is domestic Violence? Give some examples and show it can be checked.
3. Explain the provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and the amendments of 1984 and 1986.
4. Mention the main features of the rape law.

**GLOSSARY**

- |                                   |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Custodial Rape                 | : | Rape of a woman/girl in a police station.  |
| 2. Domestic Violence to, which    | : | Physical or mental abuse, injury or harm women are subject in their household.   |
| 3. Dowry bridegroom               | : | Gifts, either in cash or kind given to a by the bride's family, at the time of marriage on demand.   |
| 4. Female Foeticide               | : | The act of aborting female foetuses.   |
| 5. Female Infanticide (birth).    | : | Killing of female infants (usually soon after birth).  |
| 6. Rape                           | : | A form of sexual harassment, where a male forcibly has sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent. In the case of a minor girl even if her consent is obtained the act is punishable. |
| 7. Sexual Harassment at Workplace | : | The act of physically or orally abusing a woman in her workplace by a male.  |
| 8. Sex Determination Test         | : | A test, which is used to identify the sex of a foetus in a mother's womb.  |



Notes



Notes



**ANSWER TO INTENT QUESTIONS**

**34.1**

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 1994            | 2. Female foeticide  |
| 3. Child sex ratio | 4. Missing millions. |

**34.2**

- |                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Domestic violence | 2. Parliament           |
| 3. 30                | 4. Neighbourhood action |

**34.3**

- |          |         |
|----------|---------|
| 1. False | 2. True |
| 3. False | 4. True |

**34.4**

- |                                      |                           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. 1860                              | 2. Rape in police custody |
| 3. Vishaka vs The State of Rajasthan | 4. 1856                   |