

## Concluding Remarks

Today women have become aware of their rights and their potential and are proving themselves in various fields. They are also making organized efforts to demand their rights and have gained dignified place in society. In the last few decades woman's issues are being taken seriously by the various Government organizations and by non-government organizations too. In India also there was reawakening among the feminists in 70s because, at that time, women were not getting the equal status that was promised in the Constitution.<sup>177</sup> But it does not mean that women have achieved their goal in society. They are far from getting a satisfactory position in society. The cooperation of men is also essential to uplift women's status. In many societies women are to suffer from discrimination and therefore they play a secondary role in their family and society. This is also true of USA and UK as much as it is of India and Pakistan. Although great changes took place in every sphere of life, yet a lot remains to be done. Liberal thinkers started talking of equality, social justice and fundamental rights as they realized the increasing misery of the poor and weaker sections. At the same time, women also started demanding equal rights. In India the feminist movement grew out of the reform movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It had the full support of intellectual men who, in fact, initiated it. The feminist movement is based on the premise that in earliest societies women had a better position and were treated on par with men to a great extent

---

<sup>177</sup> Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Ohio State University Press, 1995, P.251.

and it is the objective of the movement to restore that position.<sup>178</sup> Women had a satisfactory position in Indian society in the Vedic period, which worked with men in all activities and also were a partner in the production.<sup>179</sup> Hence, women had a better status with their important role. In the developed world, on the other hand, women have been marginalized because their role in industry has decreased due to lack of skills and they have been forced to do only housework, which has no value in a capitalist economy, as it does not fetch money.<sup>180</sup>

In the 70s the UN initiated the process of improving the position of women in the world by announcing 1975 as *International Women's Year* and organizing a world conference on women in Mexico City. Later UN asked all its member nations to implement its resolution on equality, development and peace with the sub themes of employment, health and education for women and sought information on progress made through a questionnaire. Though greatest progress has been made to uplift women's conditions but in reality not much was done. Women continued to be discriminated against in family, community and world place. But for these types of conditions women themselves are responsible because they themselves accepted a lower position in society. Women, in the true sense, were not benefitted by the process of development. In fact, it had marginalized women in industry and economy. In India, the Government constituted the committee on status of women

---

<sup>178</sup> Miram Scheir, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, Vintage Books, 1972, P. xiv.

<sup>179</sup> Veder Porichay, P.200.

<sup>180</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, Jonathan Glover, *Women, culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995, PP.1-15.

in 1971, which presented its report, towards equality, in 1975 through which it has been revealed that the position of women was deteriorating in most areas. Only a few were able to make progress due to their education and employment but a majority of women were suffering in various ways.<sup>181</sup> Not only this report described the condition of women but also forced the Government and the women's associations to come out of their complacency and work for the betterment of women.

In India women's organizations started working on women's issues like domestic violence, dowry deaths, rape, discrimination at work etc. Women's studies also developed as a separate discipline in the 70s in India. Women's studies have been defined as 'studying women with a woman's perspective'. Feminism was the driving force behind women's studies. A feminist should become aware of the situation of women, of the relation of women to the world, of the oppression and discrimination to which women have been subjected and try to get a solution to change these situations. With the announcement of 1975-1985 as women's decade, efforts to reduce discrimination against women and to provide basic facilities of health and nutrition, education, employment etc. to them, increased all over the world.

We have seen that women are devalued in modern times because of their domestic role, which does not fetch money directly and in most societies women continue to

---

<sup>181</sup>Zainab Rahman, "Women and development", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.112-121.

perform this role, as it is necessary and practical. So, it becomes the duty of feminists to establish the importance of the domestic role by highlighting its importance not only in the social and emotional field but also in the economic field. A housewife can contribute a lot to her family, which had to get it done through hired labour. So, feminists should not take the attitude of contempt towards housework and housewives, which is misplaced. As a majority of women all over the world are engaged to household works, so we should try to achieve dignity for it, not run it down. Some feminists agree that the feminism of the West is not suited to Indian women. Indian women believe in compromise and get protection in their family and to them marriage means a social security.<sup>182</sup> Liberal feminism, which works for women's equality and fundamental rights for them, is suited to Indian women's conditions. So, Indian women should take all of the facilities provided by the Government as well as demand their legal rights. In most parts of the world women are the victim of patriarchy and related customs. In most of the societies women do not get the same chances or facilities as men can get even they are treated at par with men. Modern development has not been beneficial to women as has been shown by many studies and day by day crimes against women are increasing as they are coming out in the public arena. People's attitude towards women should be changed and some peculiar crimes like female foeticide,

---

<sup>182</sup>Zainab Rahman, "Women and household", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.56-63.

infanticide and child marriages can be dealt with better by creating the right type of consciousness among people.<sup>183</sup>

We also can talk about culture and religion, the important components by which women are allotted different roles than that of men. Culture is defined as the way of life of a people. Different culture includes different values, customs, beliefs and practices. We noted that in most cultures, women are given lower position.<sup>184</sup> On the other hand, religion also treats women as inferior to men in many ways. Religion considers women as the achievers of the spiritual goals but the newer religious grant a better place to women and treats them more honourably. Although women have faced many types of injustices and are the victims of evil customs today, they have been granted equal status and equal rights in society and the society also has learnt to accept women in public life and to appreciate their achievements.

Many efforts have been made by Government to encourage women in fields of education, employment and policies. But the accession of these facilities is hindered due to cultural conditioning.<sup>185</sup> In India, various laws have been made to favour of women in employment but these are being used against them. Only in the field of education women are growing up and the literacy rates for women are increasing. In India efforts were made to popularize female education during the British period. The national education policy of 1986 stresses wider women's access to various

---

<sup>183</sup> See N. Andal, *Women and Indian Society*, Rawat Publications, 2002.

<sup>184</sup> Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP.43-189.

<sup>185</sup> Hajira kumar, "Women empowerment and government Support System in India", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, PP.250-272.

educations like vocational, technical, professional and includes a chapter on 'Equality for Women's Equality'. Only middle class and higher class urban, educated women are taking up employment in professions and services, but a majority of poor and rural women are losing their jobs due to lack of skills. More than 85 percent female workers are employed in the informal sector in India. It thus indicates that there are greater chances of their being exploited by employers and middlemen.<sup>186</sup>

With regard to political participation, it has been noted that in different parts of the world women have participated in revolutions and freedom struggles. In 20<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Indian women played an important role.<sup>187</sup> Women in all countries participate in politics in very small numbers due to various socio-cultural and even economic reasons. An important achievement has been the reservation of 33 % seats for women in elections to urban and rural local bodies after 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Indian constitution in 1993. Reservation for women, at grass root level is also increasing and they are becoming aware of their power. Political participation and cooperative efforts are two important means by which rural and poor urban women are empowering themselves.

---

<sup>186</sup> See Seth Mira, *Women and Development The Indian Experience*, Sage Publications, 2001.

<sup>187</sup> Pushpa Joshi, *Gandhi on Women*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1988, P.21.

This is clear that in all over the world women are facing many problems. Health and nutrition is also a major problem of women, especially women of the developing and underdeveloped nations. Women are not equal in accessing to health and nutrition facilities because in most societies women are being given less attention and care and also not being given the best nutrition. A majority of women suffer from gynecological problems and most of the women suffer from anemia also. Discrimination against women in every sphere is a common feature. Women are also made in such a manner that they also perceive this discrimination as inevitable. But their illiteracy, their ignorance and superstitions are only responsible for keeping aside them in an inferior position.<sup>188</sup>

Crime against women is another major problem. Day by day the crimes against women are increasing. Law alone cannot prevent crime. In fact, we also cannot wipe out crime we can only reduce it. General awareness is needed to remove these crimes from the societies. Women face various types of violence; it can be in the form of domestic violence like wife beating or torture by in-laws or sexual harassment at work place. Prostitution is another one in which women get involved unwillingly or sometimes with their consent. But these are all the situations by which women are being harassed. If men start respecting women then only the crime can be fall surely.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Why Men Rule in Primitive Society", in *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP.244-263.

<sup>189</sup> See NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau), "Crime in India", New Delhi, 1998, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

Though women perform two thirds of the world's work they do not receive the respected position because their works are invisible in the sense that it does not get the right recognition. Women work at home, in the field, they work in factories, offices, hospitals, schools, colleges, they work at construction sites, in cottage industries, they also work to preserve the environment but not getting much importance.

Women's involvement in movements to preserve environment and to wipe out social evils has been recognized the world over and the recent Noble Peace Price to a woman environmentalist puts the stamp of international recognition and honour on women's contribution to preservation of the earth. Women's work should be recognized in right way so that they can help themselves as well as the whole society. At present, women are not actively involved in the decision making process at the highest levels of governments. If women are taken in decision-making bodies, they can highlight the women's problems in a better way. If women were to enjoy equal political power they would be able to control social evils like dowry, poverty and violence in a right way.

Eco- feminists' movement can be cited as the achievement of women, which brings to an important contribution of women to the world, namely their work in conservation of environment. Women of the third world countries see environmental degradation as a personal loss because their lives hugely depend on their ecosystems. These women have saved the forests and biodiversity by working



hard to regenerate nature.<sup>190</sup> They have completed huge projects of a forestation and also managed community forests and their management nicely. Women in the west have demonstrated for peace and participated in anti-war demonstrations. In the last few decades' women have managed themselves in a systematic way to bring the women's cause to the forefront. Today's women can demand their rights and different worldwide movements for human right boosted them to receive equality with men. In Indian too there has been a tremendous increase in developmental activity for women in the 80s and 90s.<sup>191</sup>

Over the few decades there has been a positive transformation in women's empowerment and economic development in our country. Although India still has to go a long way in attaining gender equality. But these efforts could not be able to bring effective improvements of women. Although Government and NGOs various schemes and activities increased the equality of life and income level of women but these have not meant that their status and empowerment have also been improved have conceded it. Women in Third World are using empowerment to improve their lives. Empowerment is a strategy, which can bring women into the mainstream of national activity. So the beginning has been made. But women have yet to achieve equality with men. While women are trying to get the equality through their movements so in that case they should get a helping hand from society. Government

---

<sup>190</sup> Jim Cheney, "ecofeminism and Deep Ecology", In *Environmental Ethics*, vol.9 (2), 1987, PP.115-145.

<sup>191</sup> See Nilangan Sengupta, *Women in the Move*, Minerva Associates Publications Calcutta, 2000.

also doing in favour of them but raising consciousness is needed regarding women issues and problems.

There are some men who have a sensitive and positive view to women's issues but by and large men do not take women's issues seriously. This is true of many societies, not India alone. Though various social legislations in favour of women have been enacted but the results are yet to be obtained. The tendency of preference for a son is as marked as even in our society. Men also flout marriage laws. Women are forced to accept the lower status that is given to them after marriage. So a changing look should be there in the family but it does not mean that women should ignore family needs. They can get their position in the midst of family life. An effective social change should be there in society in order to create the right atmosphere for development of men and women in equal measure. Women will have to use all the means available to them to get their real position in society.<sup>192</sup>

In this context Amartya Sen's comment on gender equality can be most significant. Amartya Sen has worked on problems of discrimination against women in the development process, differences between men and women under some conditions of social discrimination against women. Prof. Sen also proposed to accept the concept of "Missing Women"- estimating to exceed 100 million round the world

---

<sup>192</sup> R.K. Barik, "Women Rights in India: A Force of Social Legislation", In Prem R. Bharadwaj (ed.), *Gender Discrimination: The Politics of Women Empowerment*, Anamika Publishers, 2005, PP.154-163.

which has helped to grasp the way of understanding this problem.<sup>193</sup> Prof. Sen. gave his deep concern looking at the “many faces of gender inequality”, mainly focused on South Asia following the census of 2001, he found a split India, something of a social and cultural divide across India. He also identified the principal issues, insisting on the need of ‘taking a plural view of gender in equality’<sup>194</sup> and invited a new action to combat the gender inequality.

According to Prof. Sen gender inequality exists in most parts of the world, from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to the U.S.A. He illustrated different kind’s disparity between women and men such as mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facility inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality, ownership inequality and household inequality.

Amartya Sen mentioned that in some regions in the world inequality between women and men has been observed which involves matters of life and death as for example in North Africa and in Asia including China and South Asia mortality inequality takes the brutal form of it. Besides, natality inequality also exists in society in a wider way. The preference for boys over girls and the tendency of parents wanting the new born to be a boy rather than a girl reveals the matter that inequality exists in society in a strong form. Sex selection process has become

---

<sup>193</sup> See Amartya Sen, “*More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing*”, *The New York Review of Books*.

<sup>194</sup> Amartya Sen, “Equality of What?” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, v. 1. Cambridge U.P., 1980, PP. 197–220

common in many countries, namely in East Asia, China, South Korea, Singapore etc. sex determination has emerged as a significant phenomenon.<sup>195</sup>

Amartya Sen has portrayed the picture where women get a lower level of attention than boys. Afghanistan may be the only country in the world where the government excludes girls from schooling. Except this in many countries like in Africa, Asia, Latin America women have less opportunity of schooling than boys have, even women are not encouraged to cultivate their own talents in social functioning matters.

The most shocking thing has revealed from Sen's writing that in some of the richest countries like in Europe and North America gender discrimination in higher education has been observed. The main reason behind this is the respective 'provinces' of men and women are different. Prof. Sen feels that even though this beliefs about the provinces of men and women are now rather rare, nevertheless the stereotype can be seen in many areas of education and training process. In some areas as in work, occupation women often have to face a greater gap from men. This problem has specially been observed in Japan where women get trouble in the matter of higher education, basic facilities. In this context Prof. Sen has quoted a television programme named "Yes Minister", where there was an episode in which the minister tried to find out from the immovable permanent secretary. Sir Humptery, by asking the question-how many women are in really senior position in

---

<sup>195</sup> See Amartya Sen, "Welfare Economics and Inequality", In *Inequality Reexamined*, published to Oxford University Press, 1995.

the British Civil Service? His answer was not shocking but the truth that "Approximately none".

Prof. Sen has thrown light in the matter of ownership in equality. According to him this type of inequality has existed in most parts of the world. The absences of claims to property make it harder for women to enter in commercial, economic and some social activities. He also feels that there are often enough, inequalities in gender relations within the family which can take many different forms. Most of the time it has been observed that family arrangements is quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of household work and child care, as if it is taken for granted that like men women are also allowed to do work if and only if they could combine with various unequally shared household works. Prof. Sen calls it the 'division of labour' which not only reveals the unequal relations within the family but also it derives inequalities in employment and recognition in the outside world. The lack of this advantage has effected on the knowledge and understanding of different works in professional circles.

In short, Arartya Sen's understanding about gender inequality helps us to recognize the most important thing that the gender disparity is not one affliction, but many. Indeed, people should go beyond everything and need to look at the values received traditionally; the masculinity values women themselves may not be immune. So what have mostly been needed are not just the feminine activities to get freedom but the changing mind of thinking to get freedom from traditional social bias.

His famous article on 'More than 100 Million Women are Missing' is a significant work in women related issues or problems where it has been said that this is a mistaken belief that women make up a majority of the world's population. Because in South Asia, West Asia and China the ratio of women to men is as low as 0.94, or even lower. There are around 105 or 106 male children for every 100 female children and considerable research has shown that if women and men were given same attention, women would have lived longer than men. Generally men get more advantages than women which start right from the birth. If the same attention would be given to women they tend to have better survival rates than men. According to Sen's concept women suffer little discrimination even in basic nutrition and health care and this is mainly due to the result of social and environmental differences. Consequently, women seem to have lower death rates than men at most ages whenever they get roughly similar treatment in the matters of life and death.

In India the death rate is higher for women than for men in all age groups as women suffer from different diseases due to negligence. Most of Asia and North Africa too women are given unequal medical care and social services than men. Amartya Sen has taken some area of Africa, viz; sub-Saharan, for example, when women suffer from extreme poverty, and hunger which results the ratio of women to men is slightly higher than one to one (i.e., 1.01). The ratio of women to men in the Indian

states of Punjab and Haryana, is a remarkably low, 0.86 while the state of Kerala in South Western India has a ratio higher than 1.03.

Prof. Sen has shown a terrible picture of inequality and neglect to the mortality of women that the lower of women to men in South Asia, West Asia and China is about 0.94 but since in countries where men and women receive similar care, the ratio is about 1.05. So the real shortfall is about 11 percent. According to Sen's research, it was estimated in his writing that 50 million "missing women" taking 1.05 as the benchmark ratio and Prof. Sen said that if this number is added to those in South Asia, West Asia and North Africa, a great many more than 100 million women are missing which makes us understand the high rate of mortality of women.

To solve the problems of women we can go through the path of contemporary thinkers. Gandhiji has said that men and women should bear the burden of life equally without having the sense of superiority or inferiority. To Gandhi both men and women are essentially equal. He thinks... "Strictly speaking, as between man and woman neither should be regarded as (on the whole) superior or inferior. The place and functions of both are different, and god has defined both. But look at the barbarous customs.... (Of *purdah*, or veiling the head and face)...why should not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?"<sup>196</sup> To Sri Aurobindo a woman is a mother goddess, she is *sakti* of the divinity-through its manifestation the world is originated, maintained

---

<sup>196</sup>Pushpa Joshi, *Gandhi on Women*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1988, P.149.

and destroyed. Aurobindo believes that in each woman mother lives.<sup>197</sup> Swami Vivekananda's thought on women has given a way to understand women as a human soul, not as sex only.<sup>198</sup> Because he saw no distinction between sex and said:

"The Soul has neither sex, nor caste nor imperfection".

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved".

"The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence".

Vivekananda says that as soul has no sex, and in the body only sex exists, the man who desires to reach the spirit cannot hold the sex distinction.<sup>199</sup>

According to Vivekananda in India there is much difference between men and women, but Vedanta declares that only one and some conscious self is present in all beings. But in society women have turned into manufacturing machines by the hard rules made by societies. Here Vivekananda says that until or unless men raise the women they will not have other way to raise. If we go to Vedic or Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi and other ladies had taken places of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. Vivekananda himself had raised the question that if women in Vedic age were entitled to spiritual knowledge, then why they should not have the same privilege now?

---

<sup>197</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, Vol.25, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Pondicherry, 1972, PP.10-12.

<sup>198</sup> Vivekananda, Swami (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 Volumes, Advaita Ashrama(2001) [1907],

<sup>199</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Vivekananda*, vol.4, Advaita Ashram, P.176.



Vivekananda strongly claims that all nations can attain greatness by paying proper respect to women and that country, that nation which does not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.<sup>200</sup> According to Vivekananda, we should not think ourselves men and women, but as the human beings, who born to cherish and to help one another. Men and women in every country have different ways of understanding and judging things, because men have one kind of angle of vision, women another, men argue from one standpoint, women from another. So Vivekananda says that:

“In the west its ideal is wife, in India in the mother”. According to him in India mother is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the Universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas.<sup>201</sup> Vivekananda considers that our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal, female, and thus we never say: ‘the first manifestation of God is the land that rocks the cradle’.<sup>202</sup>

We think that men and women belong to different gender. This is biologically true and there is no point of denying this fact. Accordingly, both men and women possess different nature and their liking and disliking are also different. At the same time it is unfortunate that women have been struggling from the antiquity of enjoying the

---

<sup>200</sup>Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Vivekananda*, vol.7, Advaita Ashram, P.214-215.

<sup>201</sup>Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Vivekananda*, vol.7, Advaita Ashram, P.378

<sup>202</sup>Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Vivekananda*, vol.4, Advaita Ashram, P.170

basic human rights. It would really be a shame to the mankind in general that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the issue of domination and subjugation on women is a relevant and fair cry. In the past, the well-being of women, in some sense or other, had been protected. In this regard, we can mention the age of Aryans when women enjoyed well-being in the true sense of the term. But this was not lasting long. When a crisis in terms of economic or natural calamities occurred, it had been revealed that women and children were the most sufferers. 21<sup>st</sup> century is the age of the domination of economy. In this era, money matters the most. Nobody can deny it. The well-being aspect of women is not at all associated with economy. Therefore, Professor Amartya Sen in his recent studies has emphasized on the agency-aspect of women. According to Sen, so long the agency-aspect of women has not been developed; emancipation of women in the true sense of the term would be a far cry. Accordingly, Professor Sen gives different proposals through which the agency-aspect of women can be developed in the course of time.

The other issues that we like to address are the patriarchy and religious dogma that people of 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot overcome. According to Ramchandra Guha, patrism and religious dogma are the two stumbling blocks of the emancipation of women even in these days. Even though Vivekananda was talking about universal religion long back, but the so-called religion that we are being witnessed in India even these days are no longer universal in nature. In India there are multifarious religious sects and each and every religion is compartmentalized in the sense that

there we find hardly any unification in the ground level even though the priests of different religious organizations are vocal about the unification of religion. Even though there is unity among diversity in India and this in fact is the privilege aspect of Indian democracy, but at the same time we have been witnessing religious conflict now and then. More, importantly, there we do not find any substantive protection in terms of women emancipation in any religion. Even if there is some protection in the theoretical level, but in the ground level the application of this is almost nil. In each and every religion, the well-being of the women has been stated, but so long the agency-aspect of women has not been developed through education, through participation in different bodies and organizations, the fate of women remains the same in the coming centuries. The fate of women in the developed countries is far better than the developing countries simply because the people of developed countries are not the pathfinders of blind religious myths. Women are more educated in the developed countries; they take part in different bodies, contributing economic assistance to the family. Therefore, the only solutions of the emancipation of women are (i) to emphasize on proper institutional education; (ii) to emphasize on the agency aspect of women instead of the well-being aspect of women; (iii) to open up the opportunity to take part in different decision making bodies; (iv) to involve in contributing economic assistance. Besides these, women should rely that by virtue of possessing different biological nature, they cannot do the same job like men. Women should realize that the works they perform are not

inferior by any means. So long patriarchy will remain in the family, so long religious dogma will subsist in the mind of male persons, the conflict between male and female remains in the society and family. The problem of female is that due to their very nature they are subversive. The subordination of women in most cases has been exploited by the patriarchy society. Thus, at the end, there remain two alternative options before women's emancipation. First, women according to their very nature must satisfy with the actions they usually perform and secondly, they must realize that the actions they perform are by no means inferior in compare to others' performing action. Having said this, emphasis should be given in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the agency-aspect of women instead of the well-being aspect of women. The well-being aspect of women insists women to keep around family. It does not authorize women to take part in decision making bodies. Therefore, the well-being aspect of women keeps women silence in most cases. Thus, the single line resolution is that the development of the agency-aspect of women can be the real solution of emancipating women from the bondage of patriarchy.