

FEMINISM : AN ISSUE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Arts (Philosophy) under the University of North Bengal

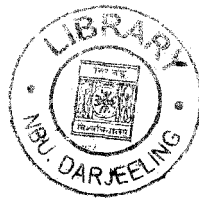
Submitted by

LAXMI SAHA

Under the Supervision of

Dr. Kantilal Das

Professor of Philosophy



**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL
Darjeeling, West Bengal**

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Dedicated to

My Son

ABHINABA

Preface& Acknowledgement

For a long time 'Feminism' had been a discussing issue among men and women. Feminism is a driving force behind women's movements and the aim of feminism is to promote the interests of women. Since long there had been an accepted tendency that all types of activities related to women belong to the private domain of individual within the family. Due to this belief women's issues were discussed only within the household domain but the gradual change in the attitude towards women's questions has started in different dimensions. A new kind of awareness is visible among women. This phenomenon has given rise to women's movements and Feminism is that kind of movement.

The inferior status of women in the society and their ongoing problems on different issues, kept me on constant thinking regarding women's unstable existence. Feminists' thinking, theories and their movements influenced me to go into the deep understanding of feminism and thereby I decided to work on this issue. Through this issue we can find a solution by which the existing power relations between women and men in our society can be changed so that women can come out from the back pages into the mainstream in our society. I believe that our contemporary thinkers with their valuable suggestions and insights can help us to solve women's existing problems.

I have divided the thesis into seven chapters apart from the **Introductory** and **Concluding remarks**. The whole thesis has been categorized as 'Feminism and women's movements', 'Feminism in philosophy and ethics', 'Women's status in past traditional India', 'Socio-political apprehension of women status', 'Gender discrimination and the crisis of morality', 'Feminism and Eco-feminism' and 'Empowerment of women', respectively. Throughout the chapters we propose to discuss about women's movements around the world, their past and present status, about the problem of gender discrimination in our society, women's relation with nature and also about the empowerment of women. To understand the issue and the need of feminism we have to go for a deep understanding of women's problems with a sympathetic view. Feminism is about liberation, liberation from our traditional social structure, which is in favour of patriarchy and also liberation from gender discrimination. Gender disparity is a burning issue of a country, more specifically the developing economies of the world. Perhaps, there is no region in the developing world where women are equal to men in social, political, legal and economic rights. The major areas where gender disparities are basically sustained from time immemorial are female-male ratio, literacy rate, food and nutrition, health care facilities, work, participation rate, opportunity to employment, access to economic resources, participation rate in political process and administrative jobs etc.

In such a situation the most important thing is to impart education to women and to make them economically independent. But from ancient times women in Indian

society were neglected. Though the world developed in the way of modern information technology, the Indian society is far away to divide the power equally among women till today. The reason behind this is that the participation of women is very deplorable in the field of education.

A patriarchal society considers women as inferior to men. As she is considered to be inferior, a woman has to face discrimination, disrespect, humiliation control, exploitation and torture. It is under such circumstance that there have been going on several sorts of efforts throughout the world to accord the women class, their due status and dignity by removing the sex-based discrimination. In a very simple language, one may hold that the basic ideal of Feminism is to liberate a woman from all kinds of bondage and control so that she can enjoy equality and dignity and thereby earn the right to control her life with a real sense of freedom and dignity. Very briefly, the main principle of feminism is that the society is based on sex-based discrimination and secondly, the system based only on the dominating power of men will have to be wiped out.

It becomes my earnest obligation to acknowledge those persons whose contribution helped me a lot to pass the journey of making the thesis with great enthusiasms and satisfaction. First and foremost there is my supervisor, Dr. Kantilal Das, Professor of Philosophy, University of North Bengal, a very down to earth person, whose scholarly guidance extended my thought process. His constant inspiration gave me a way to think the subject in a broader sense and it is his encouragement that taught

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I also acknowledge the contribution of Central library of University of North Bengal for providing me the requiring materials and journals. I specially thank Mr. Mayukh

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I thank to my parents for bringing me in this beautiful world and their insights played a crucial role in my doctoral research. My sister-in-law gave me a great support at the time when I was suffering from depression from hard working. My brother constantly helped me through the whole period of my research by providing computer knowledge without which I could not have been able to finish my journey of making the thesis so nicely. So my special thanks to my brother. My husband, being a real partner, always stood by me and extended his helping hands towards the completion of the thesis. My son, who is the most important part of me, gave me various joyful moments which helped me to complete an arduous task like Ph.D. with greatest happiness. It is my son who gave me the feeling to understand the meaning of motherhood and this feeling inspired me to face the challenges in life. Therefore I dedicate my thesis to my loving son.

Laxmi Saha

05.09.13

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	6
CHAPTER 1:	
<i>Feminism and Women's Movements</i>	20-48
America	24
Britain	29
First wave feminism	33
Second wave feminism	34
Third wave feminism	35
CHARPER 2:	
<i>Feminists' approach to Philosophy and Ethics</i>	49-60
Feminism in Philosophy	49
Feminism in Ethics	51
Value dualism and the logic of domination	54
Language: dominance or difference?	57
CHAPTER 3:	
<i>Women status in the past traditional Indian culture</i>	61-83
Status of women in Indian society	62

Ancient India	65
Myth and reality about women	66
Laws in Judaism and Christianity	67
Woman and Hindu tradition	68
Gender of God	70
Women in the Vedas	72
Property Rights	73
Study of Scriptures	75
Education	76
Marriage	76
Divorce	78
Remarriage	79
Sati	79
Women in Medieval era	80
Social practices	81
Sati	81
Jauhar	82
Child marriages	82

CHAPTER 4:

<i>Socio-political apprehension of women's status</i>	84-105
Economic participation of women in different countries	99
Status of women managers in India	100
Few women in Government politics	102

Advocating for women, children and families	103
National politics	104

CHAPTER 5:

<i>Gender discrimination and the crisis of morality</i>	106-134
What is gender-based violence?	107
Empowerment, equality, and equity	110
Women and problems of gender discrimination	111
Problems of working women	114
The changing status of women	123
Gender inequality and development approaches	128
Gender inequality in human life	129

CHAPTER 6:

<i>Feminism and eco-feminism</i>	135-153
Eco-feminist analysis	137
Woman-nature connections	144
Conceptual connections	145
Empirical and experimental connections	148
Symbolic connections	149
Epistemological connections	150
Political connections	151
Ethical connections	152
Theoretical connections	152

CHAPTER 7:

<i>Empowerment of women</i>	155-182
Perspectives of empowerment of women in India	162
Women in globalization	163
A profile on women population and employment	166
Some steps for the empowerment of women	169
Objectives	172
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	183-202
<i>Bibliography</i>	203-212

Introduction

“To awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened once she is on the move, the family moves, the villages and nation moves.” Jawaharlal Nehru

The aim of my thesis is to explain and examine the status of women in society going through the theory of feminism. In this thesis I have tried to highlight the unequal status of women and to show how women are forced to face inequality in every sphere in their life. We know that women form nearly half the population of the world and it is fair that any modern country should provide a balanced opportunity structure for men and women so that both can contribute equally to development efforts. According to Vivekananda women are just one wing of a bird and if one wing of the bird is absent, the bird cannot fly. Similarly, no nation can be flourished by forfeiting women. Women are the backbone of a nation. Unless women make progress, the society cannot develop truly. In spite of this basic truth, women are not given adequate opportunities to develop and play an important role in the process of development in most societies, even today. Although women accomplish two thirds of the world's working hours, they are treated as second class citizens in most societies. In India since independence, equal rights and equal status has been granted but very few women, who are educated, have been able to achieve equality in various fields and still at large numbers of them are discriminated, exploited and subjugated. Feminism is a movement to assert the interest of women as a sex and to

protest their discriminations, exploitations. Feminism is a humanistic concern and it is about liberation from our traditional social structure, liberation from patriarchy and also liberation from gender discrimination. In the field of education we see gender discrimination at all levels. Feminists say that the rigid sex based division of labour is the most obvious form of expressing women's inequality.¹

The problem of patriarchy, gender inequality, socio-cultural oppression and ritual form of torture on women has plagued both the East and West since the dawn of civilization. One of the major developments in the second half of the twentieth century has been the emergence of a growing consciousness, a systematic move by feminists and women's upliftment organizations in France, America, England, India and other parts of the world to liberate women from the bondage of religion and traditional ethics and also from the socio-cultural bondage of inferiority, inequality, patriarchal ego and phallogocentric politics.² Different feminists thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft ('A Vindication of the Rights of Women', 1792), Simone de Beauvoir ('The Second Sex', 1949), Judith Butler's ('Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity', 1990), John Stuart Mill's ('The Subjection of Women, 1869'), have raised the basic question which is mainly to save women from the patriarchal domination, gender crisis etc.³

¹ Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Ohio State University Press, 1995, p.251

² Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski, "Margaret Fuller: Feminist Writer and Revolutionary (1810-1850)". In Dale Spender, *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*, Pantheon books, 1983, pp.75-89.

³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge, 1993, P.95.

As Mary Wollstonecraft, in her writing 'A vindication of the rights of women' asserted that women should have an education commensurate with their position in society and redefine that position by arguing with the claim that women are most important and essential to the nation because a woman can educate a society by providing education to its children and as well as she can be best 'companion' to her husband. She also claimed the view that woman is first of all a human being rather than a sexual being and rejecting the discrimination between men and women, she further argues that women have every right to lead a rational human life, and they must come out from their suffocating boundary of different household works to the larger periphery of the society to get the social, political, cultural freedom.⁴In the **First Chapter** of this thesis which is entitled as **Feminism and Women's Movements**, I propose to discuss about this kind of women suppression and about women's movements, their critical conditions in society. Feminism itself is a movement to restore to women their humanity. The concept of feminism developed in Europe in the 18th century when social and intellectual upheavals were taking place there. At that time people were against of the existing order in political areas and women were also involved in this movement to get liberty and equality. All feminists are concerned about women's oppression and want to find out its causes. There are different kinds of feminists, they also differ in their analyses of the causes

⁴ See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the rights of Woman: with Structures on political and moral Rights*, Printed at Boston by Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, 1792.

of the subordinate position of women but they all are same in the matter of demanding equality and liberty of women.

The British philosopher John Lock, in his book *Second Treatise of Government*, 1689, talked about the equal status of men and women without any discrimination. J.S Mill, in his book, *The Subjection of Women*, criticized the dominance of stronger sex and asserted the view that gender is socially constructed and the general view of women's subordinated position in society is not acceptable. An illegal subordination of one sex to the other is one of the major offences to woman kind. He maintains that the principle which executes the power relation between men and women is wrong. Mill advocates the concept of meritocracy rather than aristocracy with the view that both male and female as human being should have equal opportunity to achieve their goals. He firmly rejected women's inferior, weak and irrational status.⁵

Now it should be pointed out that feminists were concerned with 'philosophy' and discussed epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, methodology, philosophy of science from a feminist point of view as most of the great figures in the history of philosophy, when they talked about women, were plainly sexist, in conformity with the patriarchal ideology of their times. Lange in Aristotle's two essays named "Woman is not a rational animal: on Aristotle's biology of reproduction" and "Aristotle and the politicization of the soul"- describes the close

⁵ J.S Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, London, 1869, p. 133.

connection between Aristotle's biology and his political philosophy. She (Lange) declares how Aristotle's opinion that woman, being a "privation of man", should be dominated by man rests on Aristotle's theories of generation and sex distinction. In the **Second Chapter**, which is entitled as **Feminism in philosophy and Ethics**, I propose to discuss how feminism has thrown a new light to the problems of philosophy by challenging the traditional philosophy as an aggressive argumentative style as it is based on patriarchal nature. Feminist philosophers also criticized the traditional ethics as it mainly focused on men's perspective.⁶ Feminist ethics is mainly to transform the traditional ethical beliefs which devalued women. But if we go to the *Vedic* society, it would see that this society was conducive to the freedom of women because it recognized women's potentiality.⁷ There were women like Gārgī, Maitreyī, Lopāmudrā and Arundhatī who could challenge any audacious male intellect. Vedic girls enjoyed liberty for free love and for attending socio-cultural functions. Though the *Ṛig Vedic* age gave freedom to women, the subsequent periods in socio-cultural history of India showed a picture of victimization and ritual form of torture which is proved from the epics, *Puraṇas*, *Smṛitis*, *Sutras* and *Dharma Śāstras*. For example, Sita was tested in fire on the altar of chastity, Draupatī, being the wife of five husbands, was turned into a commodity and was humiliated before the elders by her husbands on the one side, and by the Kauravas on another side. Yudhisthira, the son of Dharma himself underestimates

⁶ See Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: perspectives on Difference and Equality*, Indiana University Press, 1991.

⁷ B.S. Upadhyaya, *Women in Ṛgveda*, rev. ed., Benaras: 1941, p.3

women by saying that the Vedas, the Ṛishis and moral laws have held women to be false. Moreover, the pathetic lament of Gandhari in the 'Strivilāpa Parva' of *The Mahābhārata* bears true testimony to the fact that the epic women were really helpless and sub-servant to the dominant male ego. In *Manusmṛiti* women's freedom was curtailed and Manu maintains that a female must be subjected to her father in her childhood, to her husband in youth and to her son in old age. Manu emphasized the birth of a male child (*Putrārthe Kriyate bhārya*) and deprecated the female one, and this fact is proved to be fatal even in present society.⁸ The Rajputs blindly followed Manu and used to curse the inauspicious day when a female child was born. The introduction of 'Sati' system forced a wife to burn herself on the pyre of her dead husband. Dowry system and widowhood are the two other rituals of torture from which it is very difficult to protect women in our society. In the **Third Chapter** which is entitled as **Women status in the Past traditional Indian culture**, I propose to discuss on the issue of women's status with regard to the ancient traditional Indian culture. In this section, it has been proposed to describe that the women are part of our life and they have an important role in one's development of personality. Men and women are equal in status and woman is man's companion. In society there should be a kind of mutual co-operation between them. Through the India's ancient culture we came to know that Indian tradition respected womanhood and an honoured place had been ascribed to women. But

⁸*Manu-Smṛiti*, 9/2.

during the medieval period women's position went down considerably and their position became very miserable because at that time there were so many customs for which they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. But in the modern India women's position has changed. Now they are getting equal opportunities to that of men especially they have the right to receive education and they can also participate in the public and the political life of the nation. But still in society there are some sorts of evils, which cannot be removed from the society fully even these days.⁹

However, human civilization is an evolutionary process and has taken thousands of years to reach present modern stage. Men and women have equally contributed its growth yet with the passage of time there has been discrimination between the two sexes. The global empowerment process informs us of the neglected condition of women in social, economic and political field. In the societal aspect all family affairs are managed and coordinated by the decisions of the male members and a woman has nothing to say. In the domestic dictionary, a woman is regarded second in command and the patriarchal superiority standard has always suppressed women.¹⁰ Moreover a woman is reared up from her early childhood to be soft, loving, submissive, tolerant, less questioning and going beyond all these makes her an object of social suspect. As a result, the economic empowerment of women seems to

⁹Chandrakala Padia (Ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IAS, Simla, 2002, PP.205-206.

¹⁰Judith Butler, "Preface", *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 2006, PP.XX.

be a distant dream because in the process of profit-making activity women participation is not easily welcomed.¹¹ Actually women are expected to provide manual service to the productive enterprise and also they are expected to discharge all their household duties without any complaints. Even after these, they are not respected as their household works do not bring money at home. Another discriminated picture is seen all over the world when one peeps into the political status of women. Most of the women are not politically educated, nor trained nor empowered because their political rights are often neglected. They are not expected to be very active and able participants in the political process of a country of its decision making all over the world. The traditional category of political thought is mainly based on male knowledge and man's experiences. Men are projected as "productive", "political", "public" and "rational" whereas women as "non-productive", "non-political", "private" and "emotional". Political philosopher Bentham held the view that women are confined with child care and they do not care for the welfare of their nation. J.S. Mill said that the great occupation of women should be to beautify life; they are to water others' plants. Simon de Beauvoir, on the other hand, claims that it is the whole process by which "feminity is manufactured in society". A woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. In the **Fourth Chapter**, which is entitled as **Socio- Political apprehension of women's status**, I propose to show

¹¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, Jonathan Glover, *Women, culture, and Development: A study of Human Capabilities*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995, PP.1-15.

the socio-political apprehension of women's status, their participation in politics. Political participation is necessary not only as a means to understand the nature of the political system or to control the functioning of system, but also as a means to build up the character of the people because political participation has some role to play in nation building but women participation in politics do not present a very rosy picture because they are heavily dominated by men in political systems.¹² Although today's women have learnt to come out from the four wall and gave their contributions to the operation of society at every level but they still remain subjects of inequality and oppression. The equality of men and women in the matter of rights has been granted by the Constitutions but discrimination against women was deeply rooted in the structure of society. So, independence was an essential precondition of the emancipation of women and a new life was brought to the movement for the emancipation of women. Vast masses of women participated in the freedom struggle after 1905.¹³ At that time women started to break their restricted lives and entered administrative, professional and political fields as equals of men. Women were elected to Parliament and State legislatures. They became cabinet ministers, Ambassadors and judges. Different institutions of education, law, technology were open to them and they got chance to enter new occupations in the modern sector. But it was observed that the right to political equality could not help or enabled women to play their role as partners and constituents in the political process.

¹²Zainab Rahman, "Women and Politics", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.142-157.

¹³ Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from The Women's Liberation Movement*, Basic Books. 2001, P.91.

Although the number of women's participation in politics increased, but their ability to produce an impact on the political process was negligible. So the erosion of productive roles makes women's position as only entities and also makes their lives cheap. Though, all the laws made various schemes to emancipate women they continued to be second-class citizens and according to the Marxists the lower degree of participant by women in politics was due to the nature of modern capital economy. Women have been socially taught to subordinate themselves, but it is the fact that they constitute half of the society, women belong to all sections and for that it is not possible to secure freedom without bringing women into the political areas. Education is an essential thing to emancipate women because an educated woman is developed and enabled to give proper response to the political issues.

Gender discrimination is another form of domination of women in our society. From ancient times in Indian society women were neglected.¹⁴ Though the world developed in the way of modern information technology the Indian society is far away to divide the power equally among women till today. In social, political, educational field, women are suppressed unanimously. The history of women is no linear, nor does it have a well-organized structure. Women's duties as good daughters, good wives and good mothers as well defined in the Indian patriarchal society. Wifhood and motherhood are accepted as pivotal role for women. In the **Fifth Chapter** which is entitled as **Gender discrimination and the crisis of**

¹⁴Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge, 1997, P.95

morality, I propose to show the picture of this kind of discrimination and gender in equalities. It has been described there that due to gender discrimination women have to face problems in every walks of their life. Women constitute about fifty percent of world's total population but vast masses of women are victims of sexual abuse, deprivation and social injustice even they are deprived of proper education, healthcare and others. Women are not treated equally with men; they are subjected to oppression, deprivation and discrimination. Especially the poorest women suffer from these kinds of injustice in the society, in the family and in the community.¹⁵ There is also violence against women in our society and in our country. Every six hours somewhere in India a young married women is either burnt alive or coerced to commit suicide. The effects of this violence can be devastating to a woman's reproductive health as well as to other aspects of her life. In the eyes of Constitution there is no discrimination between men and women, but discrimination against them has gone a long way. After 65 years of independence women still remain the secondary citizen of the country. Today's women are the companions of their male partners in every field and every sphere of life, yet our conservative social systems do not allow them independency. Gender inequality is revealed by imbalance in sex ratio, female foeticide, and lower participation of women in the decision making process etc. In order to satisfy the biological needs men oppress women. In the village community women are not involved in decision-making process and in the

¹⁵ Susan Hekman, "Material Bodies". In Donn Welton (ed.) *Body and Flesh: a Philosophical Reader*, Blackwell publishing, 1998, PP.61-70.

Muslim community women are not allowed to participate in manual work outside the home. In this way gender discrimination affects women's economic autonomy. So some reforms are needed to improve the status of women in our society. Women should be educated, they should get the fair chance in everything so that they can prove themselves as equal to that of their male partners and especially gender justice should be developed as a way of life. Now, if we minutely follow the nature of women, we would be able to see that there is a close relation between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature.¹⁶The concept of 'ecology' has a link with the concept of 'feminine'. In the **Sixth Chapter** which is entitled as **Feminism and Eco-feminism**, I propose to discuss about the relation between nature and women as well as explain the objective of eco-feminism. Eco-feminism is the concept about ecology as well about the concept of feminine and according to the eco-feminists, there is a close link between women and nature. Eco-feminism or ecological feminism is a philosophical movement came from the feminist and ecological thinking. This ecological thinking leads to the idea that the domination or oppression of women is directly connected to the abuse of the environment. Ecological feminism is a name given to a variety of positions that have roots in different feminist practices and philosophies. Naturally, these different perspectives reflect different understandings of the nature and solution to pressing environmental problems. In the **Seventh Chapter** of this thesis I propose to discuss

¹⁶ Plant Judith, (ed) *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989, P.1.



about Women's **Empowerment**. Women's empowerment means empowering women socially, economically and politically so that they can break away from the domination and claim equality.¹⁷ Women's role was confined to the domestic arena and it has now shifted into the role of productive job sectors. Millions of rural women today live work and struggle to survive. Although, women make the half of the society, their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men in most of the societies. This is mainly due to the gender disparities and the patriarchal attitudes of the people. Stereotypical attitudes and practice are the reasons of the deprivation of women in all areas of society-in culture, in institutions, work places, even in the families. Some important things are needed to empower women. There should be an environment through positive economic and social policies for development of women; they should enjoy all the rights on equal basis with men, there should be equal access to health, to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life. There also should be equal access to education, employment and security.¹⁸

Women's empowerment is the most needed ways through which women can be liberated from male domination. Women's empowerment means empowering women socially, economically and politically so that they break away from the patriarchal domination and claim equality. Traditionally, women's role was confined

¹⁷Thomas Potterfield, *the Business of Employee Empowerment democracy and ideology in the Work place*, Quorum Books, 1999, P.6.

¹⁸See National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001).

to the four walls of their house and now it has switched over to productive job sector.

In the **concluding chapter**, I propose to describe how women can be liberated or can have the equal access to opportunities. Today's women became aware of their rights and their potential and they are also proving themselves in various fields. So it can be said that women alone can change their positions. No one will give them power rather they will have to take it. Women will have to use all methods and means available to achieve the equality that has been granted to them. In this Chapter; I also propose to suggest that women's position in our society can be developed with the light of Swami Vivekananda and other contemporary thinkers' walks of life. As Swamiji says, "There is no change for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing, denying women their rightful place".

Chapter One

Feminism and Women's Movements

The Central objective of this sequel is the theoretical investigations carried out at a somewhat abstract level and to arrive at a deeper understanding of feminist contentions. Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. It may be understood as theory-systems of concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women's situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them.¹⁹ Such theory is distinguished from non-feminist thinking about women or gender by its general respect for women's own perspectives and authority, and its persistent attention to the workings of power structures which privilege men. So, it is a politics to change the existing power relations between women and men in the society. Different areas of life like family, education, worlds of work and the power relations of society structure all politics, culture and leisure. These power relations determine what we are, what we can become and what the limitations are. There is a conviction that women are oppressed and discriminated and an explicit purpose of feminism is to promote the interests of women. The aim is not to substitute women from men but to give the rightful place to women as a sex in society. The driving

¹⁹ See Suchila sing, *Feminism-Theory, Criticism, Analysis*, International, Delhi,1997

force behind women's movements is feminism. It is a movement to assert the interests of women as a sex. This does not mean that feminists want to dominant men or that they are anti-men. Basically, feminism is a humanistic concern. It is a demand to restore to women their humanity. Feminism is about liberation. A feminist perspective is to 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. There are many definitions of what a feminist is, but the simplest and probably the best is what is listed in most dictionaries "A person who believes in the full equality of women and men". Thus, it means that anyone male or female who supports this idea can be a feminist. The goal of feminism is equality and it means that women do what men have done (be fire fighters and corporate executives) and that men do what women have done (be stay at home as fathers and secretaries). It also means that women's supports should have as much support as men's supports and that neither men nor women should be afraid of walking home alone at night. Feminism means the full social, political and economic equality of men and women. The first idea that is likely to occur in the course of any historical thinking about feminism is that feminism is a social force. The emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding that, in all societies which divide the sexes into differing cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men. Feminism also depends on the premise that women can consciously and collectively change their social place. While many languages do not

have noun 'feminism', and 'feminism' as a term for the politics of equal rights for women did not come into English use until the 1890s. The word feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to eradicate sexist domination and to transform society. So that while most writers agree that in Britain feminism, as a group of political and social movements, probably dates from the 17th century, feminism as a body of answers to the 'question of woman' has a more diffuse and considerably more long-standing existence. The feminisms that constitute 'feminism'- from social reform and suffrage campaigns through to academic feminist theory-are not indistinct. ²⁰A broad frame is needed to encompass political activism as well as theory; to enclose feminist grass roots initiatives, the circling of Greenham Common missile base by 30,000 women in 1982, the suffragette banners, the disruption of Miss America pageants, and protests against dowry deaths in India, as well as organized strikes and movements.²¹

With its slogan 'the personal is political', first written by Carol Hanisch (1970), it is contemporary feminism which recognizes that politics is too diverse to be contained in the tightly boundary categories of political parties. It is small collective groups known as consciousness raising groups (CR), direct action, and radical campaigns which have shaped the political themes of contemporary feminism, not elected politicians. For example, extra-parliamentary tactics include the creation of

²⁰ Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Ohio State University Press, 1995, P.251.

²¹ Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski, "Margaret Fuller: Feminist writer and revolutionary (1810-1850)". In Dale Spender, *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*, Pantheon books, 1983, PP.75-89.

alternative institutions (Women's Aid), alternative political processes (networking), and alternative political cultures (Greenham pacifism).

Yet feminism is shaped too both by the cultural, legal and economic policies of particular societies in which it forms, as well as by the politics of reforming movements which it outgrew.

The first public declaration describes 'women' as a distinct social category with unequal social status date from before Aphra Behn.²² A clear example is the eighteenth century document by Mary Astell; some Reflections upon Marriage (1700). Organized feminism entered the arena of public politics in America and in Britain in the 1840s with suffrage petitions to parliament and campaigns for grater legislative equality such as the married women's property Act. Suffragist's success in winning the vote, in 1918 in Britain with a limited franchise and universal suffrage in 1920 in America, narrowed to 'welfare feminism' in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s with campaigns for family allowances (Britain) and legal equalities (American League of Women).²³ It was in the 1960s that militant feminism, or Women's Liberation, created a new politics out of Marxist and socialist feminisms, radical feminism and other multifarious responses to the question of why women continued to suffer social inequality, exploitation and oppression.

²² Angelina Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: a social biography of Aphra Behn*, New York: Dial press, 1980, P.243-248.

²³ Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist politics in the 1920s: The National Woman's Party", *Journal of American History* 71, 1984, pp. 43-68.

In short, if contemporary feminism is marked by its innovatory languages ('oppression', 'liberation'), its innovatory practices (Cr groups) and its innovatory campaigns around issues of rape, 'battery' and child sexual abuse, including the WSPU Abortion Campaigns started in 1911, it is true that both nineteenth and twentieth century feminisms share an urgent desire for equal rights and equal opportunities for women. And in the long view it could be argued that feminist history might stretch from Neolithic matriarchies to contemporary radical feminism, apparent, for example, in Mary Daly's book GYN/Ecology (1978), since the sweep of history gathers myriad forms of 'feminism'.²⁴

America

In the 1840s feminism began to grow into a substantial political force in America. The women's rights movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had its origins in their anti-slavery and temperance campaigns. The exclusion of women delegates, including Stanton, from the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840, resulted in the famous Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and its Declaration of sentiments which sought to apply the principles of the American Declaration of Independence to women. When the alliance between feminism and the anti-slavery movement began to dissolve, following the nominal enfranchisement of blacks but not women after the American Civil War, Anthony

²⁴ Nancy F. Cott, "What's In a Name? The Limits of Social feminism; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History", *Journal of American History*, 1989, PP.809-829.

and Stanton founded the National Woman Suffrage Association While Lucy Stone founded the National Woman Suffrage Association While Lucy Stone created the more conservative American Woman's Association.²⁵ While Anthony and Stanton added economic demands such as protective legislation to their suffrage platform in their Working Women's Association and to their 6,000 signature petition to the New York legislature, Stone tacked divorce law reform.

The suffrage movement inspired other organizations such as the International Council of Women, founded in Washington DC in 1888- the oldest and largest feminist organization in the world. Both suffrage organizations merged in 1890 to form the **National American Woman's Suffrage Association** (henceforth NAWSA) which gained the support of suffrage activists like Alice Paul who returned from Britain to found the **Congressional Union**, later the Woman's Party in 1914 and the daughter of Mrs. Stanton, Harriet Stanton Blatch who founded the Equality League in 1907. In addition, there was a groundswell of socialist feminism perhaps best represented by the settlement movement and by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her argument, in *The Man-Made World* (1911), that women should be economically independent from men.²⁶ When Carrie Chapman Catt took over the leadership of NAWSA (now the League of Women Voters) NAWSA petitions, the state-by-state campaigns and the militant action of the Woman's Party such as special suffrage

²⁵ See Dale Spender, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement This Century*, Pandora Press, 1983.

²⁶ See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

trains and anti-Woodrow Wilson demonstrations resulted in the Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 which gave women the vote.²⁷ Legal advances of women in the 1920s and 1930s scattered the possibility of a single suffrage identity of American feminism. The Woman's Party proposed equal rights amendments in order to enforce federal equality which was opposed by the League of Women Voters. While 'Welfare feminism' was the aim of New Deal feminist anti-poverty campaigns, pacifist feminists with Jane Addams formed the Woman's Peace Party, later the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at the 1915 International Congress. But it was the Equal Rights Amendment (henceforth ERA), first proposed to Congress in 1923 by the Woman's Party as an amendment to the constitution: 'Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction', which eventually became a focus for the new feminist movements of the late 1960s. When the Women's Liberation Movement (henceforth WLM) emerged in the late 1960s, it was shaped both by its similarity to first wave feminism in the way that both grew out of their limited roles in Black Rights movements (Civil Rights and Anti-Slavery) and also by changing in the political order brought about by that earlier feminism. For example in 1964, the criterion of sex was added to Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in employment, and the Act was enforced by an Equal Opportunity Commission. In other ways, Women's Liberation was radically different. Women's

²⁷ Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from The Women's Liberation Movement*, Basic Books, 2001, PP.23-88.

Liberation extended the terms 'politics' and 'the economy' to sexuality, the body and emotions, and other areas of social life previously treated as 'personal' only, and the household. The movement also created new political organizations-small anti-hierarchical consciousness-raising groups, organized and acting independently of men with a preference for direct action and alternative living patterns.²⁸ The core of WLM, and its socialist and radical heart, grew from radical groups such as the New York Redstockings whose founding membership included Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone; from a concern about reproductive issues (*The Dialectic of Sex*, 1970) and the ubiquity of patriarchy (*sexual politics*, 1970); from the first women's studies programmes such as Naomi Weinstein's seminar at the Free University of Chicago in 1976; and from direct actions such as the 1968 Miss America demonstration when bras were trashed (but not burnt).

Another crucial stimulus was the appearance of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which criticized the idea that women could only find fulfillment through childbearing and homemaking.²⁹ According to Friedan's Obituary in the new **York Times** the *Feminine Mystique* "dignified" the contemporary women's movement in 1963 and as a result permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world." In the book Friedan hypothesizes that women are victims of a false belief system that requires them to find identity

²⁸John Pettegrew, *Public Women, Public Words: A Documentary History of American Feminism*, Rowman & Littlefield, pp.16-42.

²⁹See Betty Friedan, 1963, "*The Feminine Mystique*", w.w. Norton and Co., 1963.

and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Such a system causes women to completely lose their identity in that of their family. Friedan specifically locates this system among Post-World War II middle-class suburban communities. At the same time, American's post-war economic boom had led to the development of new technologies that were supposed to make household work less difficult, but that often had the result of making women's work less meaningful and valuable. It also describes the frustration of White heterosexual middle-class women without careers, locked into domesticity, and Friedan's founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966. Now adopted a reformist agenda advocating educational and legal change but, following its 1970 strike for abortion on demand, 24-hour nurseries and equal opportunities, NOW added abortion and gay rights to its platform at the 1977 NOW conference at Houston. The Equal Rights Amendment Campaign, supported by NOW, gathered together a large number of women's organizations to fight for state-by-state ratification until the amendment expired in 1982. This campaign radicalized a wide spectrum of American women. Similarity, by the 1990s campaigns such as Women Against Pornography and Women Against Violence Against Women, Bernice Reagon's 'coalition politics', AIDS activism, Third World Women Against Violence, and the National Coalition of Black Gays, gained support across America so that the Women's movement has continued to grow in spite of New Right pro-family campaigns and Republican anti-women budgets.

Britain

Although feminist ideas date from before Aphra Behn, the first full political argument for women's rights in Britain is Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' (1792). Wollstonecraft based her argument on an analysis of the psychological and economic damage done to women from a forced dependence on men and exclusion from the public sphere.³⁰ Although Chartists and Owenties did hold suffrage discussions, it was not until the 1850s that feminism was recognized in public politics in Britain. Josephine Butler's campaigns against the **Contagious Diseases Acts** of 1864 (which required medical examinations of women suspected to be prostitutes) highlighted women's legal inferiority. In 1856 Barbara Leigh-Smith Bodichon's *A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854), initiated the Campaign for a Married Women's Property Act; and a national group of women organized through the Langham Place group of feminists, organized a petition to Parliament to widen the electorate. Further Parliamentary debates on electoral reform inspired the founding of the National Society for Women's Suffrage; supported by J.S. Mill who's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), co-authored with his wife Harriet Taylor, and is regarded as a classic liberal argument for equal rights.³¹ By the turn of the century labour women, women in the arts, the women's Cooperative Guild (1882), with its 18,000 members, and other

³⁰ Brody Miriam, "Mary Wollstonecraft's: Sexuality and Women's rights (1759-1797)". In Dale Spender. *Feminist Theorists: Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*. Patheon Books, 1983, PP. 40-59.

³¹ See John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women" 1869.

suffrage groups were combined in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). There were also radical working-class feminists, for example, the Women's Protective and Provident League (1874) which opposed protective legislation for women and the exploitation of women workers.³² But it was the founding of the Women's social and political Union (henceforth WSPU) in 1903, by Emmeline Pankurst and her daughters, which has become the best known organization of first wave feminism although equally important were the NUWSS and the Women's Freedom League (henceforth WFL). By 1908 a WSPU open-air meeting in Hyde Park attracted between a quarter and half a million people, and NUWSS events similarly engaged large numbers of people. feminism's continued high public profile, militancy and shrewd political campaigning, together with the combined effects of the WSPU, the WFL and the NUWSS ensured that with the end of the First World War, at least a limited franchise would be considered for women aged over 30(1918).³³

First wave feminism, then, was a long-lasting, highly diverse movement stretching from before the liberalism of Mary Wollstonecraft to the militant activism of Edwardian feminism. The NUWS became the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship in 1919 and by the 1920s and 1930s its energy was devoted to the political education of women. It joined the Women's Cooperative Guild, the

³²Tong Rosemarie, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Westview Press (Perseus Books),2009, P. 17.

³³Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from The Women's Liberation Movement*, Basic Books, 2001, PP.91-112.

Women's Labour League and the Six Point Group in 1921. The six objectives of this group are: equal pay, widow's pensions, equal rights of guardianship, and laws on child assault, equal civil service opportunities, and provision for unmarried mothers. These early decades of the twentieth century saw divisions between 'old' feminists, such as Ray Strachey, who wanted to end protective legislation, and 'new' feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone, who campaigned for the 'endowment of motherhood' and family allowances. These were the decades of campaigning for equal pay, for example, the annual resolutions at Labour Women's conferences; pacifist feminism in the Women's International League for peace and freedom (henceforth WILPF); and the anti-fascist activism of a wide variety of feminist women. In 1968 the rise of militant feminism which started in America became visible in Britain. The same involvement in, and the same disenchantment with, New Left causes (in Britain the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign) marks the British Women's Liberation Movement as much as its American sister. What was an additional, and uniquely British, inspiration was the impact of the militancy of women workers in the Ford Strike (1968) for equal pay. The first Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College Oxford (1970) had over 600 participants, and funneled socialist and liberation energies into demands for equal pay, 24-hour child care, free contraception, and abortion on demand.³⁴ Together with its papers *Shrew* (1969), *Spare Rib* (1972), and *Wires* (1975), the

³⁴ See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen Seventy*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

WLM battled to defend women from sexual and domestic violence by founding the innovative battered women's refuges (Chiswick 1972) and rape crisis centre. The WLM launched campaigns such as Women against Violence against Women and Reclaim the Night, and worked to advance employment rights in a Working Women's Charter (1974) supported by the national Trade Union Council. This pursuit of equal opportunities led to the practical affirmative action programmes of the municipal women's committees of which the largest and most successful was that of the Greater London Council (1982). This far-reaching London programme gave over 4.5 million to women's projects until its disbandment in 1986 by the Conservative government.³⁵

The history of feminism consists of three waves. The first wave appeared in the 19th Century. The Second wave appeared in the 1960s and 1970s and the third wave started from the 1990s to the present. It takes a number of forms in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history, and feminist literary criticism. Feminism has changed aspects of western society. Most of the leaders of feminist social and political movements, and feminist theories, have been middle-class white women, predominantly in Britain, France and the US. At least since Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to US Feminists, however, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms. This trend accelerated in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the Collapse of European

³⁵Rosemary Hennessy, Chrys Ingraham, *Materialist feminism: a reader in class, difference, and women's lives*, London: Routledge, 1997, PP 1–13.

Colonialism in Africa and European Colonies and the Third World have proposed alternative 'post-colonial' and 'Third World' feminisms as well. Some Third World feminists or post-colonial feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, are critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric. Black feminists such as Angela Davis and Alice Walker, share this view. Since the 1980s, standpoint feminists have argued that the feminist movement should address global issues (such as rape, incest and prostitution) and culturally specific issues (such as female genital mutilation in some parts of Africa and the Middle East and glass ceiling practices that impede women's advancement in developed economies) in order to understand how gender inequality interacts with racism, homophobia, lesbophobia, colonialism, and classism in a "matrix of domination". Some feminists have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as "man" and "women", are social constructs. The first wave refers to the feminist movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries which mainly dealt with the suffrage movement.³⁶ The second-wave (1960-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities. The third-wave of feminism (1990s-present) is seen as both a continuation and a response to the perceived failures of the second-wave.

First wave feminism

First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the 19th century and early 20th century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally, it

³⁶Miriam Schneir, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, Vintage Books, 1972 (1994), P. xiv.

focused on equal rights of contract and property and opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by husbands by the end of the 19th century. Activism focused primarily on gaining political power-the right of women's suffrage, though feminists like Voltairine de cleyre and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for women's sexual and reproductive and economic rights at this time. The term "first wave", was coined retrospectively after the term second wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities.³⁷

Second-wave feminism

Second wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s and, it was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism that involved the suffragettes in the UK and USA.³⁸ Second-wave feminism has existed continuously since then, and continues to coexist with what is termed third-wave feminism. The second-wave feminism saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of a sexist structure of power. If first-wave feminism focused upon absolute rights

³⁷Sarta Ahmed, *Transformation: thinking through feminism*, London: Routledge, 2000, P. 111.

³⁸See Jane F. Gerhard, *Desiring revolution: Second- wave feminism and the rewriting of American sexual thought, 1920 to 1982*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

such as suffrage, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination.

Third wave feminism

The Third-wave of feminism began in the early 1990s. The movement arose as a response to perceived failures of the second-wave. It was also a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second-wave. Third wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second-wave's "essentialist" definitions of femininity, which over emphasized the experiences of upper middle class white women.³⁹ A post structuralism interpretation of gender and sexuality is central too much of the third wave's ideology. Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro politics", and challenged the second-wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females.⁴⁰

Thus, in the western world various social, ideological and political circumstances were responsible for encouraging the women's movement for gender equality. In communist countries, especially Russia, Lenin and his wife Krupskaya were great advocates of women's equality and the Soviet rule gave equal rights to women. Russian women worked with men in secret police and in the army. In fascist countries, women were valued for producing children and bringing them up. Nitler

³⁹ See Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational conflict and Third-Wave-Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

⁴⁰ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 20-28,

did not favour women's participation in war efforts. He said a woman's battlefield is her home where she produces children for the nation. Thus Fascist countries did not encourage women's movement.

In India women's movement was born out of the social reform movements of 19th and 20th century. At first philanthropic men initiated welfare programmes for women, later on, women took the lead themselves by starting All India Women's Conference. Gandhi's encouragement of women taking part in the freedom struggle gave a new confidence to women and helped the women's movement. All feminists are concerned about women's subordination and want to find out its cause. Within the women's movement there have been three major ideological positions described as *Liberal Feminism*, *Radical Feminism* and *Socialist feminism*. They differ in their analysis of the causes of the subordinate position of women and consequently in their action programmes.

Liberal Feminism started in 18th century in Europe. Liberal feminism is the most widely known form of feminist thought. It is certainly the 'moderate' or 'mainstream' face of feminism. Liberal philosophy was based on reason, equality and individual freedom.⁴¹ In this approach the explanation for women's position in society is seen in terms of unequal rights or artificial barrier to women's participation in the public world, beyond the family and household. The focus of

⁴¹Tong Rosemarie, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Oxon, United Kingdom: Unwin Human Ltd, 1989, Chapter 1.

liberal feminist was on the public sphere, on legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals to compete in the public market.

The basic idea of liberal feminism was that women are foremost human beings and not sexual beings. Women should have freedom to act according to their wishes, as they are rational creatures and they should not be denied natural rights. Though sometimes this freedom from social restraint is understood in terms of freedom from 'interference' by the state or government, more often it is seen as freedom from the bonds of custom or prejudice. The Liberals accepted the sex role differences and expected women to take care of the home and thus contribute to the well-being of society. But they contended that both sexes are equal and so women should have the same role like men. In this context, it can be mentioned that the Indian social reformers of 19th century had similar thoughts. Liberal feminist political strategies reflect a conception of a fundamentally sexually undifferentiated human nature, i.e., since women are much the same as men so women should do the same what men can do but they did not emphasize upon the reform of society rather than revolutionary changes.⁴² Liberal feminism draws on welfare liberalism—a form of liberal political thought influenced by writers such as J.S. Mill. Liberal feminists also take from welfare liberalism a limited acknowledgement of social or collective responsibility, i.e. they accept a need for some intervention in the competition between individuals for social opportunities and reject so-called laissez-faire

⁴² See Bell Hooks, *Feminist Thought: From Margin to Center* Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984.

liberalism which argues that freedom and justice are best served by nominal government and that a just and natural inequality will emerge if individuals are left to their own devices. In the 1960s, liberal feminism extended the concept of equality to new areas like demand for children facilities, rights of poor women and control over one's reproductive life. Liberals accepted the existing social order and also wanted equal rights but they were not able to provide more insights into causes of inferior status of women.

Radical feminism started in 1970s. This feminism, unlike liberal and Marxist/socialist feminism, is not drawn directly from previous bodies of 'male stream' thought. It has some links with liberal feminism, e.g. some feminists spoke of sexual politics but it offers a real challenge and rejection of the liberal orientation towards the public world of men. Liberal feminism did not consider the connection between sexual oppression, sexual division of labour and the economic class structure. So, it claimed for reforms. Indeed, it gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into arenas of activity associated with men. Radical feminists demand the destruction of patriarchy.⁴³ It pays attention to women's oppression as women in a social order dominated by men. Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, etc., are some well-known radical feminists who see patriarchy as male control over women's fertility. Actually, the distinguishing character of women's oppression is their oppression as women, not as members of

⁴³Zenili, Linda M.G., *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005, P.101.

other groups such as their social class.⁴⁴ Hence, the explanation for women's oppression is seen as lying in sexual oppression. Women are oppressed because of their sex. The notion *shared oppression* is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women. There is a strategic focus on women's similarities and the pleasures of forming political and other bonds between women in a world where such bonds are marginalized or dismissed. In this context, Jhonson comments: 'one of the basic tenets of Radical Feminism is that any woman...has more in common with any other woman-regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, nationality-than any woman has with any man.' Sexual oppression is seen as the oldest and even the most profound form of inequality. The radicals believe patriarchy is an autonomous historical fact rooted in biology than economy and according to them the gender relations are the fundamental form of oppression. Due to the biological differences there is the male domination of power over women in society. The Radical do not favour marriage and family because these institutions help to establish patriarchy in society. Given the significance of patriarchy to radical feminism, it is appropriate to provide a brief account of the term. The subject of considerable debate remains widely used and refers to the systemic and/or systematic 'organization of male supremacy and female subordination'. Stacy summarizes three major instances of its usage: *historical, materialist and psychological*. She notes that some feminists employ patriarchy to trace the

⁴⁴ See Dale Spender, *For the Record: The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge*, London: The Women's Press, 1985.

historical emergence and development of systems of male domination. Others use the term to explore the sexual division of labour (that is, to explore the 'material'-or concrete structural, bodily, physical-aspects of social organization which divide up and differentially value tasks and activities on the basis of sex). And, finally, certain feminists perceive the term as enabling recognition of the deep-rooted nature of male dominance in the very formation and organization of ourselves (the psychological or unconscious internalizing of social patterns of sexual hierarchy). Radical feminists draw upon all three of these usages of patriarchy as well as others and are among the most committed to its continued employment because of its centrality to their analysis. Radical feminism describes sexual oppression as the very least a fundamental form of oppression and the primary oppression for women.⁴⁵ Men, as a group, are considered to be the beneficiaries of this systematic and systemic form of power. In radical feminism, all men are unambiguously viewed as having power over at least some women. Indeed, this approach commonly suggests that any man is in a position of power relative to all women, and possibly some men. Indeed, this approach suggests that any man is in a position of power relative to all women, and possibly some men. In this context, it is stated that radical feminists perceive all men without exception as sharing in the benefits of a social system of male supremacy (patriarchy). This does not, however, mean that all men are invariably oppressive to all women all the time, nor does this

⁴⁵ Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University, 2005, pp. 1–176.

deny that some men, at least, may struggle to overcome this system of domination. Radical feminist thinkers consider sexual oppression to be profoundly entrenched, frequently depicting it as the original form of coercive power. It's strong interest in recovering or discovering positive elements in femininity in combination with its location of men as the beneficiaries of sexual power relations, results in a relatively sharp division drawn between men and women. However, other radical feminist writers note that male domination is a social structure and not the consequence of some in-built male propensity. In other words, feminists in this tradition see a difference between men and women as inevitable. Indeed, the radicals present a social and political change required to overthrow the system of male domination as far-reaching. They generally advocate a revolutionary model of social change and want women to unite and become self-reliant and overthrow male dominance by a complete sexual revolution.

Socialist feminism is still in nascent form. Socialist feminists attempt to maintain some elements of Marxism regarding the significance of class distinctions and labour.⁴⁶ All socialist feminists assert that women's subordination predated the development of class-based societies and hence that women's oppression could not be caused by class division.⁴⁷ But some socialist women see that complete equality is not found even in socialist society. They feel that to bring equality only the

⁴⁶Charlotte Krolokke, Anne Scott Sorensen, "Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls" In *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance*, Sage, 2005, P. 24

⁴⁷D. Hague and L. Carruthers, "Socialist-feminism and trade unions: Work in the P.S.A", In *Scarlet Woman* 13, 1981, PP.2-5.

overthrow of capitalism is not enough but the overthrow of patriarchy is also essential. There are several versions of socialist feminism which sometimes incorporate the influence of psychoanalytic feminisms. The three major socialist feminist's traditions which may be described as deriving from debates between radical and Marxist feminists. The first strand involves a concern with the social construction of sex (gender) which was largely seen in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. The second major strand of socialist feminism attempts to draw the work of radical and Marxist feminists into one theory to as capitalist patriarchy. The third form of socialist feminism offers a more full-blown account of systems in which sexual and class oppression interact but are not cast as dependent forms. These versions of socialist feminism are identified by their views of the relationship between class and sex i.e., the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy.⁴⁸ According to socialist feminist, women's subordinate status is rooted in private property and class divided society. The powerlessness of women is rooted in four basic structures: those of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Some socialist feminist also think that women's oppression is based on unpaid domestic work. They are not anti-man; they believe in collaboration, the men support their cause. So, in general, it can be said that feminism is for liberation and is also for equality. For a long time, there had been an accepted tendency that all types of activities related to women belong to the private domain of individual

⁴⁸ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, Ballantine Books, 2003, P. 464

within the family. Due to this belief, women's issues were discussed only within the household domain. However, the gradual change in the attitude towards women's questions has started including different dimensions. A new kind of awareness is visible among women and this phenomenon has given rise to women's movement. Women's movement is one of the most dominant thrust areas of 'Gender Studies' having an interdisciplinary nature. It is a way as well as an indicator of social change in society because until now, women have been in back pages with an inferior status in the society as compared to their male counterparts.⁴⁹

By the 1980s western feminism could no longer be divided into the three general categories of liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist traditions because many other possibilities of feminists' perspectives became a feature of academic feminism at least. Psychoanalysis was one of the more influential streams of thought which could be reassessed by feminists in western countries. The work of psychoanalysis was reconsidered as an element within the works of some Marxist/Socialist feminists. Psychoanalytic feminists share in common with radical feminism- an interest in the issue of difference in relation to the sexes. The influence of psychoanalysis has produced two major variants. One is Freudian feminism which attended to the significance of psychology and added scientific justification to claims for female inferiority by analyzing the impact of women's responsibility for mothering. The second groupings are Lacanian feminists who draw upon the work

⁴⁹Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, London: Routledge, 2003 PP. 1-16, 67-80

of Jacques Lacan, an interpreter of Freud's analytic method. Lacanian feminist approaches are linked with French and to a lesser extent some British and Australians writers. There are two sub-groups within lacanian feminism, that is, those who more or less follow Lacan's interpretation of psychoanalysis and those who may be described as post Lacanians or French feminists.⁵⁰

The main concern of *psychoanalysis* is to offer an account, or analysis, of the mind's- the psychic's structure and its relation to the body, and use that as the basis for treating certain kinds of sickness. Psychoanalysis is popularly known as the 'talking cure'. Some of psychoanalysis' central concepts are penis envy, the Oedipus complex, the phallic symbol. As these terms suggest, psychoanalysis is closely concerned with gender, sexuality, family relations, and, as we shall see, the fact that their expression and construction are not always available to the conscious mind. Clearly these areas are also those of central interest to feminism. How the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism has functioned, that will be cleared after knowing the Freud's role in the origins of psychoanalysis. Freud described psychoanalysis as a phenomenon of the 20th century (The Interpretation of Dreams was published in 1900), but also acknowledged the 19th century precursors whose work he synthesized in producing his central concepts, particularly that of the unconscious.⁵¹ In 1887, Freud started investigating of the mind by taking up the theory of his colleague Josef Breuer that 'hysteria was the

⁵⁰ Chiesa Lorenzo, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, MIT Press, 2007, P.67.

⁵¹ See Charles Shepherdson, *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

product of a physical trauma which had been forgotten by the patient'. Together they wrote *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), which was based on a collection of five case histories of women 'suffering from reminiscences'. It was clear from the cases that the women's fears and phobias and physical symptoms all turned out to have their origins in repressed memories. While analyzing on the hysteria cases, it suggested that there were parts of the mind unavailable either to the subject her-or himself, or to an observer; these parts are what Freud was to call 'the unconscious. During his analysis, Frued established three principles which he elaborated upon for the rest of his career. The unconscious, argued Frued, consists of the activity of primary sexual and destructive instincts, which are in conflict with internal forces of self-preservation, and external social forces.⁵² Second, the analysis of dreams proved invaluable in accessing the unconscious; as did, thirdly, Freud's working out of the relationship between primary (unconscious) and secondary (conscious) thought processes. Later, he divided the psyche into the more familiar realms of the id (the repository of unstructured instincts), the ego (the realistic element) and the super ego (the internalized parental function, moral and critical).

In between 1893 and 1895, Frued developed the theory of the Oedipus complex and infantile sexuality. In the former the small boy loves his mother and feels a jealous hatred of his father. His complex is resolved by the 'castration complex': the father steps in to forbid the boy access to the mother, on pain of losing his organ, and the

⁵² Sigmund Freud, *On Metapsychology*, Penguin 1984, P. 207

boy, in obeying, identifies with the father and the power he wields. Freud makes the little boy the model for both sexes, and describes the little girl as a deficient version of him: she 'extends her judgment of inferiority from her stunted penis to her whole self', as he puts it (Freud 1962:193). Because she is already 'castrated', in not possessing a penis, the little girl's Oedipus complex is not resolved but initiated by the castration complex. In her case, according to Freud, she now loves her father and hates the betraying mother, who has 'sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped.' It is clear from these comments of Freud's why the Oedipus complex is problematic for feminist psychoanalysis, as it constructs women as the inferior 'second sex', in Simon de Beauvoir's phrase. Post-Freudians have made modifications to this apparent prescriptiveness: Lacan emphasized the power-symbolism of the phallus, which can theoretically be appropriated by either sex⁵³; Klein argued that the Oedipus complex occurs much earlier than Freud suggests, and the infant's drives focus not on the father and his anatomy, but on the mother and hers. Freud only produced writings on feminine identity and female sexuality itself late in his career. As we have seen, his central concepts took the male child as a model, so that the female seemed like an imperfect version. Luce Irigaray has fascinatingly analyzed the scattered writings of Freud on femininity and concluded that his definition of its nature is strikingly similar to that of melancholia, or depression. Like the melancholic, a woman prefers affection to passion; has little

⁵³ See J. Lacan, "The Freudian Thing" and "Psychoanalysis and its Teaching" in *Écrits*, W.W Norton, 2006.

interest in the outside world; and has suffered a primordial disappointment-castration, in the woman's case. In other words, female sexuality is necessarily pathological, as melancholia is in men (Irigaray 1985). Juliet Mitchell claims that feminist objections to Freud, including his ignoring the social position of the women. Her argument is that Freud is describing and not prescribing the nature of the symbolic order. Freudian psychoanalysis offered to feminism a useful synthesis of earlier work on the idea of the unconscious, and a discourse about the body and sexuality.⁵⁴ It may seem that Freudian terms describe the negative sides of femininity in a society in which it is repressed. The primacy of the penis as principal signifier of sexual difference could be read in symbolic terms, as a signifier of power in a society in which men are dominant and control, social institutions, including family. Yet there are some problems with this issue. The attempt to avoid the inevitable patriarchal consequences of psycho-sexual development by making it the historical product of a culture which is patriarchal, but need not always be, is fraught with difficulties. Freudian theory uses visible anatomical difference as its guarantee of psychic difference and women's inferiority. But why social relations should take this form is not clear. It assumes that they are a manifestation of the nature of man. This gives rise to the problem of how anatomical difference can ever acquire a different status and meaning in which femininity is either of equal value or cultural norms of femininity and masculinity are dissolved. Furthermore, feminists

⁵⁴ See S. Freud. (1905), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality VII* (2nd ed.), Hogarth Press, 1955.

might wish to question both psychoanalytic assumptions about feminine and masculine qualities and the psychoanalytic practice of reducing these qualities and subjective identity to sexual difference, whether this is psychic, biological or socially constructed.⁵⁵

In Freud, the femininity or masculinity which the normal adult must achieve through her or his psycho-sexual development represent culturally and historically specific forms of gender identity. These assume a universal status. The social structures which guarantee psycho-sexual development are also fixed and involve an acceptance of the universality of the oedipal triangle and the incest taboo. These social norms underpinning psycho-analytic theory receive their clearest expression in the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss, who, in an attempt to develop a universal theory of human society, makes the incest taboo and the exchange of women by men the founding principles of all cultures. For feminists, the key questions must be whether this a historicism is politically and theoretically useful, and whether it is possible or desirable to develop a psychoanalytic model which does not make universal claims but is historically and socially specific in nature.

⁵⁵ See Freud. (1906), "My Views on the Part played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses", Standard Edition, vol 7, Hogarth Press, 1953.

Chapter Two

Feminists approach to Philosophy and Ethics

Feminism in philosophy

Feminism has provided a new vision to the problems of philosophy and so it has a deep connection with philosophy. Feminism pursues a perspective to the traditional problems of philosophy. ⁵⁶For example, feminist epistemologists challenged traditional ideas of how we explain things, by arguing that the traditional philosophical ideas are based on male perspectives and therefore ignore women's rights. According to some feminists, traditional philosophy had the aggressive argumentative style as being male focused and patriarchal in nature. Moreover, some other feminists think that the aggressiveness of traditional philosophy can be used to feminist ends. But some feminists have also criticized other feminists for attacking traditional philosophy as they think that aggression is a valid female trait, and that feminists should not seek to repeat traditional sex roles which state women cannot be aggressive.

Feminist philosophers engaged in a search of re-explained the philosophical cannon mainly in two significant areas of concern. The first is the problem of historical exclusion. Feminist philosophers had to face with a tradition that believed that there

⁵⁶ Moira Gatens, *Feminism as "Password": Rethinking the "Possible" with Spinoza and Deleuze*, *Hypatia* 15 (2) 2000, pp.59-75.

were no women philosophers and if there were any, they are unimportant. But women are not entirely absent from the history of philosophy, that brings us to the second challenge. Generally, it can be said that philosophical norms like reason and objectivity are defined in contrast to matter, the irrational or whatever a given philosopher associates with women and the feminine and here women have to face a problem that they are irrational by nature, because our tradition tells us that philosophical norms of reason and objectivity exclude everything that is feminine or associated with women either implicitly through images and metaphors or explicitly in so many words.⁵⁷

Feminist philosophers have criticized both the historical exclusion of women from the philosophical tradition and the negative characterization of women or the feminine in it. Feminists' historians of philosophy have claimed that the historical record is incomplete because it omits women philosophers. It is biased because it devalues any women philosophers. In addition, feminist philosophers have argued that the philosophical tradition is conceptually flawed because of the way that its fundamental norms like reasons and objectivity are gendered male. By means of this criticism feminist philosophers are enlarging the philosophical canon and re-evaluating its norms in order to include women in the philosophical "US".

Feminist philosophy of science shows the ways in which gender ought to influence human conceptions of knowledge and the practices of inquiry and justification. It

⁵⁷Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*. University of Minnesota Press, 1986, PP.viii, 280.

finds ways in which conceptions and practices of knowledge systematically disadvantage women and other subordinated groups. Some feminist epistemology and philosophy of science have argued that dominant knowledge practices disadvantage women by (1) excluding women from enquiry; (2) by denying women epistemic authority; (3) by denigrating women's "feminine" cognitive styles and modes of knowledge; (4) by producing the theories of women that represent them as inferior; (5) by producing theories of social phenomena that render women's activities and interests or gendered power relations invisible and (6) by producing knowledge that is not useful for people in subordinate positions.⁵⁸Feminists' epistemologists show these problems to flawed conceptions of knowledge, knower, objectivity and scientific methodology. These philosophers offers a way to overcome these failures and they also tend to explain why the entry of women and feminist scholars into different disciplines, especially in biology and social sciences, have generated new questions, theories, methods. In this connection a new question can be raised regarding women domination and it can explain what value dualism is **and** what is the **logic of domination**?

Feminism in Ethics

Feminists approach to ethics is to re-imagine ethics as it is based on the belief that traditional ethics devalued women's' moral experience. Feminist philosophers criticized the traditional ethics because it focused on men's perspective with little

⁵⁸ Janet A Kourany, *Philosophy of Science after Feminism*, Oxford University Press, 2010, Chapter-3.

regard for women's viewpoints. Traditionally, women were treated as ethically immature and inferior to men and therefore it prizes the masculine characteristics like "independence", "autonomy", "intellect", "wariness", "domination", "culture", "asceticism" and "transcendence". On the other hand, it gives less importance to feminine characteristics like "interdependence", "trust", "immanence", "emotion" and "peace". So feminist's ethics is a way to transform the traditional ethical beliefs which undervalued women's morality.

Feminist ethics occurred during the 19th century with the new ideas and it developed from Mary Wollstonecraft's writing: "Vindication of the rights of women" in 1792.⁵⁹ Feminist ethics was further developed by some other notable people like John Stuart Mill, Cathrine Beech, Cady Stanton, etc. The aim of feminist ethics is for changing the society where women are harmed through violence, subordination and exclusion. Now the question is raised: whether women's feminine traits are the product of nature or it is the outcome of social conditioning? Mary Wollstonecraft gives the opinion that moral virtue is unitary. Women, she said, should practice the same morality that men practice i.e.; human morality. She denied that women are predestined by nature to be less virtuous than men. Wollstonecraft has said that there is nothing wrong about women including their supposedly weak moral characters that cannot be cured by a rigorous education but if women are given men's education, said Wollstonecraft, women no less than men can become morally

⁵⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of The Rights of Women: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects*, Boston: Peter Edes, 1792, Chapter-iv & v.

mature human beings. She also said that the women of her times needed a better education and that time the purpose of educating women was simply to be the good daughters, affectionate sisters and better wives which would serve men's interest properly. Wollstonecraft said that the best way for women to come full-fledged moral agents is for them to start thinking and behaving like men.

According to **J.S. Mill** society is mistaken to set up an ethical double standard which means women's morality is to be assessed differently than men's morality. ⁶⁰In his writing "The Subjection of Women", Mill has said that women are taught to live for others who always give and never take and therefore women's virtue is the consequence of social programming. Mill considers that there is only one virtue i.e.; human virtue and men and women both equally should adhere to its standards. Only then our will society will develop and it will go toward the extreme progress.

Catherine Beecher was another leading campaigner of the same group of thinkers. She saw women to be treated like a good manager who are in the family to serve themselves for others' interest only. The most important work of women is to make member of her family like Christ who died a painful death and people remember Him from His great virtuous policy, i.e.; the virtue of 'Self-denying- benevolence' which women also should acquire for serving her family, said Beecher, because women are better situated than men to cultivate the Christ like virtue and to become a role models for their families irrespective of her own wills and wishes.

⁶⁰Henry R. West, *An Introduction to Mill's Utilitarian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, P. 22.

Beecher also saw the differences between women's and men's moralities and she stressed that women's house affairs require much more intelligence like any other organizational skills.

In short 18th and 19th century feminist thinkers approached to ethics that mainly focused on the similarities and differences between masculine and feminine ethics. They mainly questioned the presuppositions of existent traditional ethics and instead they suggested the ontological assumption that *the more connected the self is to others, the better the self is*. That time a new variety of feminism, a care focused feminists, approached to ethics in the sense that care focused feminist thinkers noticed instances of female subordination and the tendencies of patriarchal societies ignoring women's ways of thinking. Thus, care focused feminist thinkers offered to women multiple ways to understand the ways in which gender, class, race affect their moral decisions. Therefore, according to the *care focused feminists* a special attention should be given to women's moral experience like men's, because traditional ethicists focused on men's interests, issues, values to neglect women. So, finally feminist's ethics insist on highlighting women's morality by adding women's moral experiences to a male biased traditional ethics sorely in need of them.

Value dualism and the logic of domination

Eco-feminism is originated as a revolt against value dualism. A value dualism is a disjunctive pair in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional and exclusive and in

which one from of value enjoys a higher degree than other. Many ecological feminists conceive that a reason/nature dualism underlies the conceptual framework of Western patriarchal cultures. This basic form of dualism is thought to form the basis for series of related dualism in which whatever is associated with reason is viewed as fundamentally different and superior to whatever is associated with nature. The dualistic pairs involve not only reason/nature and masculine/feminine, but also mental/manual, civilized/primitive, and human/nature. These pairs function to legitimate a number of oppressions, including sex, race, and class oppression, which can all be seen in terms of the central dualism underlying the system. According to Plumwood, the construction of dualised identities involves five features: (i) back grounding, ii) radical exclusion, iii) incorporation, iv) instrumentalism and v) Homogenization. All these lead to a typical form of argument what may be called, in brief, logic of domination.⁶¹

The Logic of domination is stated as

(A1) Human do, plants do not; have the capacity to consciously change the community in which they live.

(A2) Whatever has this capacity is normally superior to whatever doesn't have it.

(A3) Human are morally superior to plants and rocks.

⁶¹, A.K Salleh. "Deeper than deep ecology: the ecofeminist connection" in *Environmental ethics*, Vol.6.No.1. 1984, p.340

(A4) For any x and y, if x is morally superior to y, then x is morally justified in subordination plants and rocks.

Since men identify women with nature, the same logic of domination of women can be stated below:

(b1) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with the human, and the realm of the mental.

(B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (below) whatever is identified the 'human' and the realm of the mental.

(B3) Thus, women are inferior to men.

(B4) For any x and y, if x is superior to y, then x is justified in subordination y.

(B5) Men are justified is subordination women.

It has been claimed by many eco-feminists that the domination of nature by humans and the sexiest domination of women by men are based on the same general framework. Accordingly, the devaluation of women depends on the prior devaluation of nature. They are conceptually linked with each other. If think that there underlies a conceptual link between the domination of nature as well as the domination of women, then it follows that a movement that is not feminist will yield, at best, superficial understanding of the domination of nature. It has been held that in order to save the environment, one ought to be working to overthrow patriarchy;

the root of domination, and those working to bring down/overwhelm patriarchy should be fighting to save the environment. At a conceptual level, these fights are two sides of the same coin. The logic of domination, therefore, underlies not only sexism and naturism, but racism and all other isms as well.

Language: dominance or difference?

Feminist language research in the 1970s focused on the question of male dominance and the female deference in conversation (Lakoff, R. 1975; Spender 1980). It criticized both the social system, which it viewed as patriarchal and as forcing women to speak in a subservient way, and also individual males who were seen to violate the rights of their female interlocutors. Robin Lakoff's polemical analysis of what she considered female language patterns was one of the first feminist linguistic analyses that made a clear connection between the social and political oppression of women as a group and their linguistic behavior. This subordinated status was displayed in the language patterns, which she describes 'talking like a lady' (Lakoff, R. 1975; 10). She gives, as an example, two statements, which, she suggested, characterize the difference between women's subordinated language and men's dominant language:⁶²

1. Oh, dear, you have put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.

⁶² Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.167-68.

2. Shit, you have put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again. (Lakoff, R 1975:10)

The first, Lakoff asserts, is women's language and the second is men's language. This distinction is made primarily on the basis of perceptions that (1) is more polite than (2) because of the 'softer' expletive which mitigates the force of the utterance and therefore is less of a challenge to the interlocutor's face. Lakoff makes a connection between seemingly stronger expletives and stronger positions in relation to power.

Lakoff and Dale Spender (1980) argued that women's language style was characterized by the use of elements, which signaled subordination. This feature consists of mitigating statements, hedges, tag questions and elements which signal indirectness, tentativeness, difference and hesitation. In contrast to this, male speech was characterized as direct, forceful and confident, using features such as interruption. As a polemic, this early feminist research was extremely important since it challenged the assumption that certain males were sanctioned to act linguistically in ways which could disadvantage women and it made those linguistic acts seem less 'natural' or 'common sense'. Many women also questioned their own deferent linguistic behavior as 'natural', as just part of being women. Thus, this consciousness-raising research, which was very widely led by people outside academic circles, made a major impact on many women, forcing them to reflect on language use as an indicator of power relations and,

indeed, encouraging them to reflect on language use as an indicator of power relations and, indeed, encouraging them to make met linguistic comments on language use. Perhaps, one of the most important aspects of this work is that women felt that they could comment on an interruption by a male interlocutor and, rather than dismissing such behavior as solely due to the particular chauvinism of that individual, they could relate it to wider societal structures which made available to men privileged positions which it did not prove for women.

However, critics have noted that this type of analysis seemed to be focused on the stereotypical language usages of a very small group of women that is middle-class; white Anglo-American. It was not based on the examination of any data but rather on personal anecdotes, which seemed to uphold a stereotype of submissive women, without any counter-examples being considered. In the 1980s and 1990s, many feminist linguists, such as Deborah Tannen and Jennifer Coates, rather than analyzing dominance, as such, made it clear that the nature of power relations between women and men were being fundamentally changed at this time turned to an analysis of the socially constructed differences between women and men's language. They saw these differences as akin to dialects spoken by different groups, rather than seeing those as indicating dominate and dominated groups (Coates and Cameron 1988, Tannen 1991; Coates

1996).⁶³This female and male linguistic difference, Tannen argued, developed because women and men are largely socialized in single-sex groups where they develop different language preferences and styles. Women and men have different aims in conversation, which lead to breakdowns in communication or misunderstanding. This is because women are concerned to establish rapport between members of a group and to ensure that conversations go smoothly (rapport talk), whilst men are concerned to establish their place in the pecking order and use the production of information as a tool to move up the hierarchy (rapport Talk). Although Tannen claims that men can also do 'rapport talk', she argues that generally such is not the case. Moreover, she believes, use of these diametrically opposed styles is what leads to misunderstanding between men and women.

⁶³ See D. Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, London: Virgo, 1991.

Chapter Three

Women Status in the Past Traditional Indian Culture

In this chapter we propose to deal with the concept of women in Indian tradition. Women are part and parcel of our life, as each and every person is related to woman at least once in a life in the form of mother in the childhood, if not more. Hence, women have a prominent role in one's development of personality and nourishment. Woman is man's companion, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the activities of man of the very minutest detail and she has an equal right to enjoy freedom and liberty. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought to be the natural condition of things and not just as a result of learning to read and write. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless man has been enjoying superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have. Many of the movements stop halfway and much of the work does not yield appropriate results because of the condition of our women.⁶⁴

Men and women are equal in status, but are not identical. They are a peerless pair, each being complementary to the other; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived. Therefore, it follows from these

⁶⁴ Maria Mies, *Indian Women and Patriarchy*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1980, P.30

facts that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve an equal ruin of both.

Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood. Of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture, one of the greatest is the honoured place ascribed to women. Even God in Hinduism is regarded as half man, half woman (*Ardhanārīśhar*). "Where women are respected, there the God reside, the heavens open up and angels sing paeans of praise," says the Hindu lawgiver Manu. Women are human beings and have as much of right to development as men have. The fact that we are human beings is infinitely more important than the physiology peculiarities, which distinguish us from one another. In all human beings, irrespective of their sex, the same drama of the flesh and the spirit, of finitude and transcendence, takes place. Due to the physiological matter women cannot do some things that men can. But that does not prove that they (women) are inferior to men. The relation of man and woman is the expression of an urge for duality. Each is a self, which requires the other as its complement. The division of the sexes is biological phenomenon, not a historical event. Male and female constitute ordinarily a fundamental unity.

Status of women in Indian society

In ancient India women in many places occupied an equal position to men. Many Hindu religious books like the Vedas; Rāmāyaṇa, etc., have mentioned the names of

several women who were great scholars, poets and philosophers of the time. According to ancient Hindu scriptures, a man without his wife cannot participate in any essential religious rites. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. Wives are thus befittingly called '*Ardhānginī*'.⁶⁵

During many reigns, the queens held greater power and influence than any of the courtiers. Literary manuscripts tell us about kingdom gained and lost due to a single woman. However, in the medieval period, the status of women went down considerable. Women were considered to be inferior to men. Many historians have called this age as the 'dark age' the woman's position became very miserable. Customs of *purdah* (a black cloth worn by women to cover their face), *Sati* (burning of widows), child marriage, restrictions on widow marriage, and the prevalence of joint family systems have been the factors responsible for the injustice done towards women. Women were deprived of their rights of equality with men.

The Muslim influence on India caused considerably deterioration in the status of women. They were deprived of their rights of equality with men. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started a movement against this inequality and subjugation. The contact of Indian culture with that of British also brought improvement in the status of women. The third factor in the revival of women's position was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who induced women to participate in the Freedom movement. As

⁶⁵ A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*, Motilal, Delhi, 1962, P.239.

a result of this retrieval of freedom, women in Indian have distinguished themselves as teachers, nurses, airhostesses, booking clerks, receptionists, and doctors. They are also participating in politics and administration. But in spite of this amelioration in the status of women, the evils of illiteracy, dowry, ignorance, and economic slavery would have to be fully removed in order to give their rightful place in Indian society.

As a result of women's newly gained freedom, Indian women have distinguished themselves in various spheres of life as politicians, orators, lawyers, doctors, administrators, and diplomats. They are not only entrusted with great responsibility, but also perform their duties honestly and sincerely. There is hardly any sphere of life in which Indian women have not taken part and shown their worth. But still in our society there are some sorts of evils, which cannot be fully removed from the society. Society continues to treat widows, divorcees, and abandoned women with contempt. Widow Remarriage, while it happens frequently, is an uphill task for the couple. Many things are being done to address these problems. The National Council for Women advocates policies for women. There is an entire ministry that manages policies for women. There is also a very large body of educated women in professions. Some statistics quote more women engineers and scientist in India than in the U.S. Some other advancement includes publications created by women, several vocal women journalists and pundits, special courts for dowry deaths, and countless women specific NGOs. There have been many laudable

attempts by successive governments to raise the status of women throughout various legislations and organizations.

The status of women in India has been subject to great many changes over the past few millennia. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low point of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal right by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful.

Ancient India

Some scholars believe that in ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. However, some others hold contrasting views. Works of ancient Indian grammarians, such as Patanjali and Katyana, suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. *Rig Vedic* verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Scriptures such as *Rig-Veda* and *Upaniṣhad* mention several women sages and seers, notably Gārgī and Maitreyī.⁶⁶

Some kingdoms in the ancient India had traditions such as *nagarvadhu* ("bride of the city"). Women competed to win the coveted title of the *nagarvadhu*. Amarpālī is the most famous example of a *nagarvadhu*.

According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later (approximately 500 B.C), the status of women began to

⁶⁶ Dr. YogirajBasu: *VederParichaya*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1377 (BS) Henceforth, *VederParichaya* P. 198.

decline with the Smritis (esp. Manusmṛiti) and other religious texts curtailing women's freedom and rights. Although reformatory movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order, by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started from around sixth century.

Myth and reality about women

The very word 'woman' is symbol of eternal mystery because it seems that it is not enough for her to be flesh and blood and she should be better than what she is. Therefore, she is not allowed to take part in the incessant activity of the world and she is like an entity in this world, she is there only to make things beautiful and men are there to appreciate the beauty. This mythical idea found expression in the poet's memorable lines:⁶⁷

*Not God alone has created you O maiden,
Man has completed your being by giving you
Beauty and grace (of his hearts' desire)*

Women are always misled by this imposed ideal of womanhood and that is why her place is always behind the mist of illusion and for this only she is detached from the world and leading her life in a secluded place. Women, it seems, outside her home and obviously the household works, has no place and it has been a fact that men

⁶⁷ See Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.) *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Sangam Books, New Delhi, 1995.

were born to rule and women are to be ruled. Even within the family a son gets more attention than a daughter. It is as if man is the maker of the world, and woman's duty is to make him a home. We often consider the inherited notions, values, aspects of our tradition as false ideology but we cannot uproot this ancestral prejudice, which are in their mind. So our society cannot be free from the control power of men. Though the dowry system has been prohibited yet this is being practiced in our society nakedly and widely and for the terror of dowry thousands of women are being slaughtered. So, as long as it will remain patriarchal attitude will never change. Most of the men are in favour of dowry because in this way and through these patriarchal attitudes it is possible for them to keep women under their pressure. They are quite disdainful about talent in women and no one wants to give her the acknowledgement she deserves. In our society women do not stand in the way of other women's development. If all women can raise themselves against such pettiness and consider what is desirable for them, some of these problems can be solved.

Laws in Judaism and Christianity

In ancient Judea some priests or prophets were the lawgivers. At that time, there was a concept that the authority of these lawgivers came from the domain of the supernatural and their intention was social cohesion. Among some communities, like tribal and postural communities, women were under the pressure of men and they were the victims of male domination. There was the myth that God directly

created Adam and Eve was an afterthought and Eve was created only to make her as a life-mate of Adam (Genesis II: 22) after the fall, God cursed man with hard work and enmity with the serpent but Eve he cursed thus: 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception....Thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee' (Genesis III: 16). So, in the *Old Testament* there are such kinds of myth regarding women and their inferior position the picture is somewhat different in the *New Testament*. With the advent of St. Paul as the *New Testament* lawgiver the attitude toward women was changed. In Paul's world, a woman's position was considered as a *second-rate citizen* and man best avoids her. The *Old Testament* gave the husband the unilateral right to divorce, and now according to the *New Testament* the wife too, could leave the husband. But Paul also asks the husband not to put away the wife away.

Woman and the Hindu tradition

The roles women play in society and the images people have of them have developed not simply from the exigencies of biology and social situations but are rather deeply rooted in the myths and legends and the religion of the culture. This is especially true of Indian culture. In the west, the Virgin Mary is hardly presented as a model that ought to be emulated whereas in India, Sita is considered just that. This has made the task of social change particularly difficult. In a patriarchal culture, what we get is masculine's definition of ideals and images of women. These ideals and visions are not women's creations. They are not born out

of their own experiences. This perspective developed by social sciences is influenced by the culture's ideology. According to most of the world views, Hindu women are degraded, downtrodden slaves. The concept of the female in Hinduism presents an important duality: on the one hand, the woman is fertile, benevolent the bestowed; on the other, she is aggressive, malevolent-the destroyer.⁶⁸ A popular statement characterizes the goddess in all her manifestation thus: in times of prosperity she indeed is Lakṣmī, who bestows prosperity in the homes of men; and in times of misfortune, she herself becomes the goddess of misfortune and brings about ruin. These two facets of femaleness relate to this duality, and perhaps provide a cultural logic for it. The female is first of all *sakti* (energy/power) the energizing principle of the universe. The female is also *prakṛiti* (nature)-the undifferentiated matter of the universe. In Hindu cosmology, although without the female there would be no energy in the universe. In fact, all beings contain their share of *śakti*, their defining qualities (*guṇa*) and actions (*karma*). Furthermore, the *śakti* that is part of an individual at birth can be increased or decreased through later actions. For example, a woman, by being a true and devoted wife, increases her *śakti*. Various austerities, particularly sexual abstinence, also increase a person's *śakti*. But even though both men and women have *śakti* as a personal attribute, the woman embodies *śakti*, the original energy of the universe.

⁶⁸ Margaret Cormack, *The Hindu Women*, Asia Publishing House, 1992, P.176

The role of women in Hinduism is often disputed, and positions range from quite fair to extremely intolerant. Hinduism is based on numerous texts, some of which date back to 2000 BCE or earlier. They are varied in authority, authenticity, content and theme, with the most authoritative being the Vedas. The position of women in Hinduism is widely dependent on the specific text and context. Positive references are made to the ideal women in texts such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, while some texts such as the *Manu Smṛiti* advocate a restriction of women's rights. In modern times, the Hindu wife has traditionally been regarded as someone who must, at all costs, remain chaste or pure. This is, in contrast, with the kingdoms, which included highly respected professional courtesans (such as Amrapālī of Vesālī) sacred *devadāsīs*, mathematicians and female magicians. Some European scholars observed in the 19th century that Hindu women were "naturally chaste" and "more virtuous" than other women, although what exactly they meant by that is open to dispute. In any case, as male foreigners they would have been denied access to the secret and sacred spaces that woman often inhabited.

Gender of God

There is a wide variety of viewpoints within the different schools and sects of Hinduism concerning the exact nature and gender (where applicable) of the supreme person or being; there are even sects that are skeptical about the existence of such a being. The *śakti* traditions, for example, focus their worship on the goddess *Durgā* as the supreme embodiment of power and feminine strength (a female form

of God). *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism* both worship Lakṣhmī with Vishnu and *Parvati* with Shiva respectively as beings on an equal level of magnitude (the male and female aspects of God). In some instances such as with *Gaudiya Vaishnavism*, specific emphasis is placed on the worship of God's female aspect (*Rādhārānī*) even above that of her paramour Krishna. Thus, it could be said that Hinduism considers God to have both male and female aspects, as the original source of both.⁶⁹

Male deities (such as Śhiva and Indra) are believed in some traditions to themselves offer worship to the Goddess, Durgā:

"O parameśhwari; (The supreme Goddess) who is praised by the husband of the daughter of Himalayas (*Śhri Śhiva*)...." "O parameshwari, who is worshiped with true of feelings by the husband of *Indrani* (Indra) please give us the spiritual personality, the victory, the glory and destroy our enemies."

Elsewhere Śhiva and Viṣṇu are also described as possessing feminine qualities represented through their *Ardhanariśhvara* and *Mohini* forms respectively. There have also been male devotees who have claimed to be incarnations of goddess, such as Narayani peedam and Bangaru Adigalar of Melmaruvathur, Tamilnadu who claim to be forms or avataros of the goddess Narayani. Hindu feminists such as Phoolan Devi have also used the goddess *Durga* as their icon. Traditions, which follow the

⁶⁹ N.N. Bhattacharjee, *Indian Mother Goddess Indian studies: Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1971, P.93.

advaita philosophy, consider that ultimately particular gender, or are transcendental to such considerations.⁷⁰

Women in the Vedas

The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to both the sexes and does not discriminate. But, despite the constitutional provisions; women do not enjoy the equality with men. Our attitude towards women stems from our religious scriptures that refer to women as contemptuous. Our oldest books are the 'Vedas' that contain highly objectionable and condemnable passages concerning women. 'Satipratha' was the custom of burning the widow with the body of her husband. 'Dasi pratha' was to keep the slave girls and the '*Niyogī prathā*' i.e. the ancient Aryan custom of childless widow are women having sexual intercourse with another husband to beget child. These were all the cruel customs responsible for the plight of the women. So, at that time female infant came to be considered as unwanted. Everyone was interested in having a son. The birth of the son was celebrated, but the birth of the daughter plunged family into gloom. 'Rig Veda' itself says that a women should beget sons. The newly married wife is blessed so that she could have ten sons, so much so, that for begetting a son, 'Vedas' prescribe a special ritual called '*punsawan Sanskar*'(a ceremony performed during third month of pregnancy).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Pranabananda Jash, *History of Saivism*, Calcutta, Roy and Chaudhury, 1974, P.130

⁷¹ *Veder Parichaya*, p.200.

During the ceremony it is prayed: "Almighty God, you have created this womb. Women may be born somewhere else but sons should be born from this womb"-Atharva Veda 6/11/3.

"O Husband, protect the son to be born. Do not make him a woman"-Atharva Veda 2/3/23.

"Lord Indra himself has said that women have very little intelligence. She cannot be taught"-Rig Veda 8/33/17.

At another place it is written:

There cannot be any friendship with a woman. Her heart is more cruel than that of a hyena"-Rig Veda 10/95/15.

'*Yayur Veda (Taitriya samhata'm)* says-"Women's code says that the women are without energy. They should not get a share in property. Even to the wicked they speak in feeble manner". *Yayur Veda* 6/5/82.

Property rights

Arthaśāstra and *Manusamhita* are sources about the woman's right to property or *stridhan* (literally meaning, property of life). It is of two types: maintenance (in money or land given by the husband), and anything else like ornaments given to her by her family, husband, in-laws and the friends of her husband. Manu further subdivides this into six types-the property given by parents at marriage, given by

the parental family when she is going to her husband's house, given by her husband out of affection (not maintenance which he is bound to give), and property given separately by brother, mother and father [Manu ix 194]. Pre-nuptial contracts are also mentioned where the groom would agree to give a set amount of bride price to both parents and the bride. Such property belonged to the wife alone and was not to be touched by the groom or her parents belonged to the wife alone and was not to be touched by the groom or her parents except in emergencies (in sickness, in famine, threaten by robbers, or for performing holy deeds). At the same time, the *Manu Smriti* contradicts itself by declaring that a wife has no property and the wealth earned is for the husband [Manu viii.416]

Daughters and sons equally inherited their mother's property; but some scriptures insist that a mother's property belongs solely to the daughters [Manu ix 131], in order of preference; unmarried daughters, married but poor daughters, married and rich daughters. When a father died, unmarried daughters had to be given a share in their father's property, equal to one-fourth from every brother's share [since it is assumed that the married daughter had been given her share at marriage] [Manu ix. 118]. If the family has no sons, the (appointed) daughter is the sole inheritor of property [Manu ix 127].

Study of scriptures

Several women sages and seers are mentioned in the Upanishads, the philosophical part of the Vedas, notable among them being Gārgī and Maitreyī. The Sanskrit word for female teachers as *Āchārya* (as opposed to *Acharya* for teacher and *Acharyini* for teacher's wife) reveal that women were also given a place Gurus.⁷²

The *Harita Dharmasutra* (of the Maitrayaniya school Yayur Veda) declares that there are two kinds of women: *Sadhyavandhu* who marry, and the *Brahmavadini* who are inclined to religion, they can wear the sacred thread, perform rituals like the *agnihotra* and read the Vedas. *Bhavabhuti's uttararamacharita* 2.3 says that *Atreyi* went to Southern India where she studied the Vedas and Indian philosophy. Shankara debated with the female philosopher Ubhaya Bharati and Madhava's shankaradigvijaya (9.63) mentions that she was well versed in the Vedas. Tirukkoneri Dasyai (15th century) wrote a commentary on Mammalian's *Tiruvaayamoli*, with reference to Vedic texts like the *Taittiriya Yayurveda*.

The *Bhagavata puraṇa* states that the Mahabharata was written specifically for women and also men who were not in the priestly Brahmin caste.

"Out of compassion, the great sage thought it wise that this would enable men to achieve that ultimate goal of life. Thus, he compiled the great historical narration

⁷² P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, BORI, 1974, pp.345-349.

called the Mahābhārata for women, labourers and friends of the twice born.⁷³In several schools for Vedic priests, many graduates are women.

Education

Katyayana's Varttika 125, 2477 mentions that there were female teachers of grammar. *Patanjali* wrote in his comments to *Ashtudhyayi* 3.3.21 and 4.1.44, that women undergo the thread ceremony before beginning their education, and says that women studied grammar.

Marriage

In a Hindu marriage, both husband and wife are two parts of one, complementing each other and becoming one in their spiritual journey. The most sacred part of the ceremony involves circumambulating the sacred fire in seven steps to a Vedic mantra where the groom addresses his wife thus the Vedas prescribe, as do most ancient cultures, that a dowry be given by the bride's family to the groom as a token for supporting the female as parents will not have to.⁷⁴

An opposing opinion is, however, that the evil of dowry is conspicuous by its absence in the entire range of authoritative religious literature of Hindus. Scholars (such as Veen Talwar Oldenburg) have shown that dowry amongst Hindus started as a result of peculiar conditions created during the British rule in India, and that

⁷³PrativaVerma, *Social Philosophy of the Mahabharata and the Manusmṛti*, New Delhi, 1988, P.90.

⁷⁴Davies John, *Hindu Philosophy: An Exposition of the System of Kapila*, New Delhi, 1981, PP.94-95.

this practice is actually attested quite well in Medieval Europe. In lieu of dowry, however, her father and brothers upon her wedding gifted brides lavishly. Those gifts constituted her personal property not subject to use or control by her husband or her in-laws. Upon her death, it passed onto her daughters. A bride's or a wife's personal wealth was called *stridhana* or the women's wealth. If the bride's father was no longer alive, her brothers were obliged to grant her a share of their own inheritance to create her *stridhana* and for her marriage.⁷⁵

In the *Manu Smṛiti*, on the other hand, 8 types of marriage are specified, two involve bedecking the bride with costly garments and ornaments before giving her away, two involve the groom's family giving a gift to the bride's and the other four do not involve an exchange of gifts.

The *Manusmṛiti* enjoins 'Let mutual fidelity continue until death, 'this may be considered as the summary of the highest law for husband and wife [Manu ix 101]. Ṛig Vedic verses suggest that the women married at mature age and were probably free to select their husband. The wedding in the Ṛig-Veda (Rv 10.85.37-38) speaks of "husband" (plural) for a single wife, but this may have mythological character.

Another reference of the past that is contrary to the present practice is of *satyawatī*, the poor and lowly fisherman's daughter in the Mahābhārata. She exercised her freedom of choice in marriage. Even Shantunu (the great kuru king) could not just

⁷⁵See Subhra Ghosh: *The social Philosophy of Manu*, New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Delhi, 2002.

go and marry her. He had to seek permission for her hand in marriage from her and her father (a lowly fisherman). He even had to agree to a pre-nuptial agreement with her promising that her own sons would inherit his throne eventually. This indicates that in ancient India a poor and lowly girl was able to exercise her power and freedom even while marrying a king.

Also Satyavati's marriage to Shantunu did not require dowry from her father, which is another indication that there was no dowry system. Moreover, she did not have to commit suicide or sati after Shantunu died which shows that sati was a custom did not exist then. After her husband's death, Satyavati remained very active in running the affairs of his kingdom (*kuru dynasty*) and even helped her sons in performing their royal duties efficiently.⁷⁶ This shows that women used to have a very active and fruitful social life when they became widowed or old and they certainly were not put to death prematurely through sati⁷⁷ etc.

Divorce

Both *Manusamhitā* and *Arthaśāstra* say that, if the husband is impotent, a traitor, evil-liver, has become an ascetic or is missing for a prescribed number of years, and then the wife can leave him without blame and marry again. *Arthaśāstra* also declares that in other circumstances, divorce can take place only by mutual consent.

⁷⁶ P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, BORI, Vol. II, 1974, PP.345-579.

⁷⁷ See Sati: *A vindication of the Hindu Women*, London, 1913.

Manu discusses situations where the wife wishes to return to her first husband whether she has simply deserted him or had married another.

Remarriage

According to all Hindu scriptures, a widow can remarry. The very term *punurbhu* is defined as a woman, virgin or not a virgin, who has married again. There are several texts that lay down her property rights in various such situations and the rights of her children from both her previous and later marriages.

Sati

Sati (as verb) is an act of immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre. Sati (as noun) is she who immolated either self-willingly or by societal inducement and compulsion. Sati was performed ideally as an act of immortal love and was believed to purge the couple of all accumulated sin. Though no scriptural mandates it, the Puranas, part of the Hindu Smṛiti; mentioned sati as highly meritorious in several instances. A few instances of Sati are recorded in the Hindu epics, which are otherwise replete with influential widows. Some examples from the Mahābhārata include: Several of Vāsudeva's wives (*rhini, DeDebaki, Bhadra and Madira*) [M.Bh. Mausalaparvan 7.18].

Madri, second wife of Pandu, who held herself responsible for his health, performed sati. His first wife Kunti did not commit Sati.

Moreover, Kunti in the Mahābhārata even had a son before marriage but went on to become a queen by marrying another man (king Pandu). It shows that the society used to value women more for their overall qualities of intelligence, determination, loyalty and leadership etc., rather than some personal and private issue such as the pre-marital virginity. Needless to say, Kunti, in spite of her pre-marital indiscretion, not only married a king but also remarried highly respected and loved by all (family and others) throughout her entire and long life and did not have to commit sati at the time of her husband's death.

In reference to India, the act of *satism* began around the inception of the Moghul Empire in 13th century. From 13th century onward, because of the death of her husband, Hindu women (who avowed to remain true to their husbands as part of the sacred ritual marriage) became targets of Muslim raiders and early conquerors of India. Since such women were vulnerable to molestation, rape and other atrocities, it became a societal means to deprive these helpless women.

Women in medieval era

The Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period. Sati, child marriages and ban on widow remarriages became part of social life in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the *rajputs* of Rajasthan, the *jauhar* was practiced. In some parts of India, the *Devadasīs* or the temple women were sexually

exploited. Polygamy was widely practiced especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were secluded to zenana. In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for 15 years, before she lost her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Ashaf Khan in 1564. Jahangir's wife Nurjehan effectively wielded imperial power and was recognized as the real force behind the Mughal throne. Sivaji's mother, Jijadbai was deputed as queen regent, because of her ability as a warrior and administrator. In south India, many women administered villages, towns, divisions and heralded social and religious institutions.⁷⁸

Social practices

Traditions such as *Sati*, *jauhar*, child marriage and *devadasi* have been banned and are largely defunct. However, some cases of those practices are still found in remote parts of India. The *purdah* is still practiced by many Indian women.⁷⁹

Sati

Sati is an old, largely defunct custom, in which the widow was immolated alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the act was supposed to be a voluntary one on the widow's part; it is believed to have been sometimes forced on the widow. The

⁷⁸ See R. Srinivasan: *Facts of Indian Culture*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1980.

⁷⁹ Raghunath Ghosh, *Sura, Man & Society: Philosophy of Harmony in Indian Tradition*, Academic Enterprise, 1984, PP.69-85.

British abolished it in 1829. There have been around forty reported cases of Sati since independence.

Jauhar

Jauhar refers to the practice of the voluntary immolation of all the wives and daughters of defeated warriors, in order to avoid capture and consequent molestation by the enemy. The practice was followed by the Rajputs of Rajasthan, who are known to place a high premium on honour.

Child marriages

Earlier child marriages were highly prevalent in India. The young girls would live with their parents till they reached puberty. In the past, the child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaving heads, living in isolation, and shunned by the society. Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice in some underdeveloped areas of the country. But the position of women in modern India has changed considerably. A woman's position in modern Indian society is equal to that of men, socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally. Women's suffering from sati, child marriage, institution of temple prostitution no longer exists. Now women have the right to receive education, inherit and own property and participate in the public and political life of the nation. Women have become economically independent and can seek employment anywhere, without remaining a domestic slave. But the evil of illiteracy, dowry and

economic slavery should be removed so that women can get their right place in society.

Chapter Four

Socio-political Apprehension of Women's Status

Political participation is a necessary ingredient of every political system. Although the political process in some societies is monopolized by only a few incumbents of political authority, every system, if found to be quite keen, is ensuring some amount of political participation by the people, by involving many in the matters of the system, political participation fosters stability and order through the re-enforcement of the legitimacy of political authority. A society, in which a substantial part of the population is denied any right to participation whatsoever, is likely to be highly explosive. The idea of this participation naturally assumes greater importance in a democratic system, which, indeed, demands it. After all, participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in democracy and rules are made accountable to the ruled. The citizens must, at least, participate in the choice of their public officials in order to keep public action responsive to the wishes and desires of the people. Participation in politics and in public debate helps to build a better and nobler character in the people. People would be better human beings if they so participated. Thus, the role of political participation has been emphasized not only as a means to understand the nature of the political system and to control the functioning of the system, but also as a means

to build up the character of the people.⁸⁰ It gives some sort of satisfaction to the citizen-satisfaction with the Government and satisfaction with one's own role.⁸¹ Participation benefits the participants as well as the larger community. It enables men by giving them a sense of their own dignity and value, alerts both rulers and the ruled to their duties and responsibilities, and broadens political understanding. Participation helps the individual to be effective and it associates him or her with the political system. The higher the rate and levels, the more varied the forms of participation, the healthier is the democratic system. Particularly in a society where certain groups are traditionally behind the others, they can be categorized as 'weaker sections' or 'disadvantaged groups'. Wider participation and mobilization at higher and higher levels would be necessary for their upliftment and that, in turn, would be healthier for the democratic system.⁸² It has also been maintained that political participation has some role to play in nation building, since it represents a means of orienting loyalties and a new feeling of national identity. Indicating the importance of the citizen's participation in a democracy, several theorists of democracy emphasize the presence of an active participant citizen as an essential condition of the successful working of the democracy. Democracy is characterized by the fact that power over significant authoritative decisions in a society is disturbed among the population. The ordinary man is expected to take as active part in governmental affairs, to be aware of how decisions are made, and to make his

⁸⁰ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Politics", In *Women and society*, Kalpaz publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.142-157.

⁸¹ See Neera Desai, Maithreyi Krishna Raj, *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publication, 1987.

⁸² Zainab Rahman, "Women's Empowerment", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.122-133.

views known. Political participation is a complex phenomenon liable to be influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities, which have a bearing on the political process. To be specific, these activities mainly are (1) voting at the polls, (2) supporting possible pressure groups by being a member of them, (3) personally communicating directly with legislators, (4) participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators, (5) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinion through face-to-face communication with other citizens. However, it is to be noted that more people discuss politics than vote, and many more vote than join parties or work in campaigns. Some empirical studies show that most people are just not especially politically oriented and political participation is not a "natural" concomitant of citizenship. Only small percentages, probably fewer than 10 percent in all democratic countries, belong to a political class.⁸³ The various forms of political involvement fall into hierarchy or continuum according to the cost in time and effort that each demands. But other variables, such as political articulations, saliency, and interest, which can only partially be reckoned into the 'costs'-also affect the frequency of the various forms of participation. Political participation is a complex phenomenon in the sense that its various forms from country to country, from era to era, from one type of people in a society to another. Some of these variations are surely due to the familiar determinants of participation (education, access information etc.). In this context

⁸³ Jane Fishburne Collier, "Women in Politics", In Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *woman Culture & Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp.68-89.

attention must also be paid to the differing situational factors in individual countries- tradition, history, access to the governing institutions, and the peculiar forms of political competition. Researchers have shown that the generalizations derived from research in Western countries may not hold equally true in India.⁸⁴ It has been pointed out that to exercise political influence is a special kind of political involvement in which female citizens, no matter where they live, or what their level of education is, find it very hard to engage in.⁸⁵ Women's roles are such in which political passivity is perceived as the norm. Men heavily dominate women in political systems. Today women are connected directly or indirectly to the operation of society at every level, and at the same time occupy the aggregate position of outsiders. A study of their experience could offer an incomparable window on the internal dynamics of social history. In developed as well as in developing economy today, it is perfectly obvious that the part played by women in various spheres of life is constantly on the increase. But it is no less obvious that women still remain subjects of inequality and oppression. This has a harmful effect both on their status and on the social climate of the society in which they live. Few people would deny today the fact that the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation.

The equality of men and women in the matter of right has been established by a large number of the Constitutions, codes and laws. The real question is to what

⁸⁴ See Sita Anantha Raman, *Women in India: A Social and Cultural History*, Praeger, 2009.

⁸⁵ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Education", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.64-71.

extent the legal declaration about the equality of the sexes has been effective in real life.⁸⁶ Constitutional provisions do not mean automatic enjoyment of the rights conferred therein. Mention may be made in this connection of the study made by Jean Mann about the women in British parliament. This study stresses that women are still *second-class citizens* in spite of the equal rights conferred on them. William Henry Chafe in his two well-known studies tried to examine the social, economic and political roles of women from 1920 to 1970. His studies point out that discrimination against women was deeply rooted in the structure of society, in the roles played by them and in the sexual division of labour which restrict females primarily to the domestic sphere of life. Whatever it accomplished, the suffrage did not alter the structure.⁸⁷

In India, the dawn of the 19th century ushered in a new era in the history of women's emancipation. The impact of British rule, the capitalist economy, and modern Western culture produced a great awakening-particularly in Bengal-which sought, among other things, to end social oppression of women. A new life was brought to the movement merged in the struggle for political independence was an essential precondition of the emancipation of women.

In India, women's triumph began in the early fifties. Middle class women came forward, from the background of restricted lives, confined to the roles of wives and

⁸⁶ Zainab Rahman, "Man-Woman Relations: Sex, Division of Labour?" Stratification Based on Sex" In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.24-37.

⁸⁷ See W.H. Chafe *American Women: Women and Equality*, Oxford University press, London: 1976.

mothers, and entered administrative, professional and political fields as equals of men. Women from aristocratic families, both Hindu and Muslim, began to abandon "purdah" and sought public offices.⁸⁸ Women were elected to Parliament and State legislatures. They became Cabinet Ministers, Governors of States, Ambassadors, and Vice-chancellors of University, and judges. Women exercised their votes in increasing numbers in successive general elections. Institutions of professional education, law and technology, which had till then barred women's entry, were thrown open to them. Women entered new occupations in the modern sector in increasing numbers. Local self-governing bodies in both urban and rural areas were asked to include some women on their panels by nomination if they did not come through election channels. In the recent Panchayat election in West Bengal, it has been reflected that there are considerable women who have contested in this election.

The Preamble to the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its citizens "justice, social economic and political, equality of status and of opportunities" to attain these national objectives, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights. Indian women were to be the beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as Indian men. Article 14 ensures equality before law, and Article 15 prohibits any discrimination. There is one specific provision in Article 15(3), which empowers the State to make any special provision for women and children. This

⁸⁸ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Development", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.112-121.

provision has enabled the State to make special provisions for women, particularly in the field labour legislation like the factories Act, the Mines Act, etc. Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens, in matters relating to employment, or appointment to any office under the State and Article 16 (2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment under the State on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, etc.

All these could suggest that the expected revolution in the status of women with the extension of their roles in the society was well on the way.⁸⁹ But the Committee on the status of women in India reached a very different conclusion. The Committee reported: "... the right to political equality has not enabled women to play their role as partners and constituents in the political process. Instead, these rights have helped to build an illusion to equality and power". In spite of increase in participation women's ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. Parties have tended to see women as appendages of the males. Among women, the leadership has become diffused and diverse, with sharp contradictions in their regard and concern for the inequalities that affect the status of women in every sphere-social, economic and political. Though women do not constitute a minority numerically, they were acquiring the feature of one by the inequality of class, status and political power.

⁸⁹ Zainab Rahman, "Status of Women in India Through the Ages", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.38-47.

Three years after the Committee's Report, a group of social scientists pointed, in an even sharper manner, to what they called "the national neglect of women". It was pointed out that unless the economic and social utility of women is enhanced in the eyes of their families and the nation by opportunities to take part in socially and economically productive roles, neglect of women by the nation would continue. Erosion of productive role emphasizes women's position as consumers and bearers of children, makes their lives cheap and easily expendable through increasing malnutrition and mortality, reduces employability through inadequate training opportunities and increases economic discrimination and exploitation.⁹⁰

Almost the same opinion had been expressed by Lenin when he delivered a speech at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-party working women: "Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery."⁹¹

According to the Marxists, the lower degree of participation by women in politics is due to the nature of modern capitalist economy. The content of existing ideology discourages women from participation in politics, from influencing the prevailing

⁹⁰ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Household", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.56-63.

⁹¹ Lenin V.I. , *On the Emancipation of Women* ,Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985, P.64

power structure.⁹² Women have, since ages, been socially taught or forced to subordinate themselves and play submissive roles in all walks of life. The rights given by the Constitution and the demands of democracy are inconsistent with the traditional attitude. This kind of incongruent political socialization has created a conflict in their minds, due to which, it is difficult for them to accept and adjust easily to the democratic political process. It may perhaps be said that there arises a conflict between their role perception and the old content of socialization.⁹³

Women constitute half the society and belong to all classes and all sections. So what is called the "woman's question" is not the question of one section only. It is ultimately the question of the entire society. On the other hand, it is an integral part of the entire social phenomenon. Human society cannot move forward without stirring half of its body, the women. Thus, it is in the social and national interest to draw womenfolk into the social and political process. To quote Lenin: "if we do not draw women into public activity into political life. Then it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism."

It is often held that the growth of education of women and their employment outside the house has led to a social change. An educated woman is more likely to be influenced by the mass media. Her understanding, developed due to education, would enable her to give a proper response to the political issues, activities and

⁹² Lenin V.I., "Women and Society", in k. Marx, Lenin V.I., F. Engels, and J.V. Stalin (eds) *The Woman question: Selections*, International Publishers, New York, 1982, PP.49-55.

⁹³ J. Gardiner, 'Political Economy of Domestic Labour Capitalist Society', In D.L. Barker and S. Allen (eds.) *Dependence and exploitation in Work and Marriage*, Longman, London, 1976, PP.109-20.

events. Thus, these factors like urbanization, education, employment, exposure to mass media etc., surely have an important impact on the participation level of women and on their attitudes. The present study seeks to find out the correlation among these variables, in order to get an idea about the extent of political participation by the women of West Bengal. In this connection, it will not be irrelevant to mention some of the comments recorded in the report of the Committee on the status of Women, published in December 1974:

“Our findings indicate that women’s participation in the political process has shown a steady increase both in election and their readiness to express their views on issues directly concerning their day-to-day life. But their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible because of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilization by political parties. The structures of the parties make them male-dominated and most party men are not free from the general prejudices and attitudes of the society. We are, therefore, forced to observe that all the indicators of participation, attitudes and impact come up with the same results-the resolution in social and political status of women for which Constitutional equality was to be only the instrument, still remains a very distant objective. While there is no doubt that the position of some groups of women has changed for the better. The large masses of women continue to lack spokesmen for understanding their problems and are committed to their removal, in the representative bodies of the state. The norms and attitudes regarding women’s role

in society remain traditional. In this sense, the new rights proved to be concessional. Thus, it is clear that despite certain legal and even institutional changes, the final legitimating for a successful reorganization of the society lies in a revolution in norms and attitudes in the minds of people. The recommendations that we make are out of a desire to make political rights of women more functional as required by the needs of a democratic system".⁹⁴ Women constitute more than half of the world's population; yet, their representation in management has been significantly low in comparison to men. However, the recent trend suggests an assuring rise in the number of women in managerial positions. Today's high profile executive women have acquired the same credibility accorded to their senior male colleagues. They have performed turnaround management tasks. Women have reached a critical mass in virtually all white collar professions, especially in business. They are, no longer, a token minority. Their values, their management styles are closer to the standard norm. These women have broken the glass ceiling to be recognized as successful, talented and practicing executives.

Yet, because of their late arrival on the management scene, their stark minority position, which makes them subject to high visibility and stereotyping and because the work organizations are embedded in a cultural milieu which still upholds, in ways, subtle and obvious, the superiority of men over women, the social reality of work organizations for women managers is often different from that of the male

⁹⁴ *Report of the Committee on the status of Women in India, Towards Equality (New Delhi Government of India, Department of social welfare, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1974), P.372.*

managers. Organizational roles and statuses have traditionally been gendered, i.e., certain positions have been considered appropriate to and filled by, women or men. This gender aspect is located within a large patriarchal social world, which is hierarchically based, with men occupying positions of dominance over women. Male domination of the organizational world in the form ownership control positions of status and authority in cultural values and hegemony has not permitted women into the managerial positions.

Until the late 1970s, women remained virtually invisible as managers and their absence was generally considered a non-issue. Since then women managers have been becoming increasingly visible in many countries. Each country produces a growing number of the qualified women seeking managerial positions, as well as, an emerging cadre of women performing every possible managerial task with zeal and favour.

An analysis of the status of women managers reveals that women managers of different countries share certain common features. These are:

Gradual increase in the number of (women) in the managerial profession increase in their education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness about their rights and the need for supplementary income are some of the reasons. However, there is still an under-representation of women in

managerial jobs. Most of them hold lower and middle management positions and the number of women remain extremely small in top management positions.

Major barriers, which restrict women's entry into managerial jobs, are stereotypical attitude towards women managers, geographical immobility of women, conflict between career and family responsibility. The stereotypical perspectives of women's traits as inferior, hence, unsuitable for leadership, restrict women's entry into management. The cultural constraints on women's access to managerial positions can be traced to the deep-rooted images of traditional women's role. Gender differences appear more deeply embedded in Asian countries than Western societies.⁹⁵

Factors that confine women managers to reach the top echelon of management are blocked opportunity, lack of support of employers, limited access to information, restricted access to training, fear of success, marriage and motherhood, prioritizations of family over career, stereotyped perceptions.

Discrimination against women managers exists, relating to remuneration, job allocation performance appraisal, promotion, training opportunities and reward structures. The exclusion of women from policy formulation and decision-making relegates them to peripheral, supportive activities. Women are better represented in

⁹⁵Zainab Rahman, "Women and Employment", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.80-89.

departments like, personnel, human resource management, marketing public relation and training and there is dearth of women in engineering and finance.

Women managers face a dual problem-work and family-which creates a lot of stress, strain and role conflict. Patriarchal divisions of labour consign household tasks, childcare, etc. to women and women's domestic roles are viewed as equal to or more important than their careers. This affects the career perspective and prospects of women directly. The dual burden is further enhance, because, lack of arrangement of flexible working arrangement, lack of childcare benefits, acute shortage of crèches and daycare facilities and re-entry policies.⁹⁶

Changes have taken place, as a result of which more number of women are recruited, for managerial jobs. The major changes are Equal Remuneration Act (equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex), removal of discriminatory clauses in labour legislation, changes in legal status of women, initiatives taken by NGOs, (Non-Government Organizations) business women clubs and media, training programmes conducted by organizations, greater availability of educational opportunities, delay in marriage and having new children, and greater awareness of women relating to their career development. But, these changes are, yet to provide a discrimination-free work environment. Form the common features; it is revealed that gender disparity owes its origin to gender discrimination, which is a worldwide

⁹⁶ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Health", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.72-79.

phenomenon. Its persistence over the years has prompted the UNDP⁹⁷ to introduce the Gender Related Index (GDI) in the year 1995, in its Human Development Report to compare the levels of gender disparity among different countries across the world, for the Human Development Report, the GDI been calculated for 137 countries in 1996. The five top ranking countries are-Sweden (1), Canada (2), Norway (3), Unites States (4) and Finland (5). Several developing countries and areas also do quite well in the GDI ranking: Barbados (16), Bahamas (18), Hong Kong (25), Uruguay (26), Singapore (29), the Republic of Korea (31), Costa Rica (32), and Thailand (33). These countries have succeeded in building the basic human capabilities of both women and men, without substantial gender disparity. India ranks 103 among the 137 countries. Niger, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso and Mali occupy the bottom five places in ascending order. Women in these countries face a double deprivation as overall human development achievement is low in these societies and women's achievement is lower than that of men's several conclusion that can be drawn from the GDI rankings. First, no society treats its women as well as its men. Second, comparing the GDI ranks of countries with their income levels confirms that removing gender inequalities is not dependent on having a high income. Third, gender equality is not necessarily associated with high economic growth. So the most persistent and rising disparities within nation and between nations has been gender disparity, despite a relentless struggle to equalize

⁹⁷ See Devaki Jain, "*Panchayati Raj: Women Changing Governance*", *Gender in Development Monograph Series# 5*, UNDP, September 1995.

opportunities between women and men and also visible in the management. Women occupy only 14 percent of managerial and administrative jobs (Human Development Report, 1996). The table below highlights the economic participation of women in different countries.

Economic Participation of Women in Different Countries

Names of Countries	Administrators and Managers	Professional and Technical Workers	Clerical and Sales Workers	Services Workers
Japan	9	42	50	54
China	12	45	39	52
Malaysia	12	45	-	-
U.K.	33	44	-	-
France	9	41	-	-
Israel	19	54	55	57
South Africa	17	47	-	-
U.S.	42	53	-	60
India	2	21	-	-

Status of women managers in India

While analyzing the status of women managers in India, it is important to discuss the status of Indian women in general. The social status of women in India is comparatively lower than many other countries of the world. Though the Constitution of India guarantees, 'Equality of Status' to women; they do not enjoy full equality in the society. The vast majority of women are illiterate, underpaid, deprived and disadvantaged. Some of our religious and social practices have steeped women in a morass of backwardness, illiteracy and ignorance, condemning them to inferior positions in society, completely dominated by men. But in urban areas, with the spread of education and the increase in number of working women outside their homes, the situation is gradually changing. Women have risen above socio-cultural tradition and well-defined role of a housewife has gradually evolved into the dual and more self-fulfilling role of a housewife and a working woman. Some of the factors responsible for this change are better education, changing socio-cultural values and the need for supplementary income caused by inflation.

Despite these changes, Indian society remains 'male dominated'. Though women have entered various jobs and professions, they are not yet recognized as sincere professional worker. They are regarded as women first, and as workers afterwards. Through the generations, Indian men have dominated women and therefore, they feel humiliated while being ordered by a woman superior. Even women are

prejudiced against each other, the reason being that women are not used to taking orders for other women. Throughout their lives they are conditioned to identify authority with male person such as fathers, husband and sons.

Coming to the political status, though Indian women constitute 24.3 crores out of a total of 51.4 crores of the electorate, their participation rate in the political process is very low. Many women, especially in the rural areas, do not exercise their franchise during elections and even if they do, they act as 'rubber stamps' of their husbands, brother or fathers. Also the representation of women in Parliament and State legislatures is not satisfactory. In the 11th Lok Sabha election (1996), out of 538 members elected there were only 36 women constituting less than 7 percent of the total membership.

A review of the economic role played by women in India reveals that, Indian women have played a distinctive and significant role in the process of earning a livelihood for the family, putting in sometimes more, sometimes less and often an equal amount of labour compared to men. In India, one third of the labour force consists of women. Workingwomen constitute only 16.43 percent of the female population of the country. Traditional village women are engaged as agricultural labourers, artisans, and producer of handicrafts and also perform menial services. The cultural

norms that influence women engaged in manual labour outside the home vary according to their positions in social hierarchy.⁹⁸

However, developments in the economic field, with increasing stress on an Industrial mode of production, have opened some avenues for women. Modernization, social change and education have enabled some women to enter new professions, and new occupations, which were totally closed to them earlier (Vidya Rani, 1990). For example, the presence of women in the public, private services and other jobs in the tertiary sector is now an accepted one. In both public and private sectors the employment of women is gradually ascending.

Few women in government and politics

Women's participation in politics and government, however, remains limited. Although their parliamentary representation has steadily increased over the past decade, gender parity in politics, at all, levels is still a long way off. By July 2006, women accounted for just fewer than 17% of parliamentarians worldwide. Then countries have no women parliamentarians at all, and in more than 40 others, women account for less than 10% of legislators. At current annual rate of growth in the proportion of women members of national parliaments-about 0.5% worldwide-gender parity in National legislatures will not be achieved until 2068. The under representation of women at the ministerial level and in local government is even

⁹⁸ Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality", In Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Ed.), *Woman Culture & Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP.18-43.

more marked than in national legislatures, as of January 2005, women accounted for just over 14% of government ministers worldwide, 19 governments had no women ministers at all, and among those governments that did include women, most had a token presence of around one to three women ministers. As of March 2006, only three countries-Chile, Spain and Sweden had achieved gender parity in ministerial portfolios. At the local level, women account for less than 1 in 10 of the world's mayors.

There are, however, some encouraging trends in women's participation at the highest level of national politics; Sub-Saharan Africa has its first woman president. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, and Michelle Bachelet was elected to the presidency of Chile in early 2006, Latvia became the first former Soviet Republic to choose a female president as chief of state in 1999, Finland, Ireland and Philippines also currently have women president. Women are heads of government in Bangladesh, Germany, Jamaica, New Zealand, Mozambique, Netherlands and the Republic of Korea.

Advocating for women, children and families

Through constrained by the limited and nascent nature of women's participation in national legislatures, the available evidence indicates that their involvement fosters direct and tangible changes in policy outcomes that reflect the priorities, experiences and contributions of women, children and families. Women, in politics,

are making a difference in at least three important arenas: national legislatures, local government and post conflict reconstruction.

National politics

A better representation of women in parliament can make legislatures more gender and child sensitive can influence legislation and policies that address the rights of both groups. Case studies confirm a strong commitment by women legislators to issues related to children, women and families. For example, a pioneering study of women legislators in Latin America found that in the 1993-1194 parliaments, women deputies in Argentina were 9.55 more likely to sponsor children and family bills than their male counterparts. Recent evidence suggests that this pattern hold true over the subsequent decade, with women legislators in Argentina playing a crucial role in ensuring the passage of a law that modified that country's penal code to explicitly define sexual crimes against women and children.⁹⁹

However India should work towards empowering women economically through microfinance programs and encourage them to be panchayats or in village councils as women leaders. As India falls in the lowest quartile with respect to the number of women in parliament(9.1%). The UAE with 22.5%, has more women representatives according to the UN's 2008 survey of women in politics which said that 15thLokSabha elections have delivered a record having 59 women as members

⁹⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* Princeton University Press, Part-1, Chapter-2, 1981, PP.101-147.

of parliament, most probably the highest since independence, and 17 of these women are under 40 and the representation of women leaders at the grassroots level in India is nearly 50%, since the passing 73rd amendment in 1992 according to which one-third of all seats are allotted to women. Panchayati Raj (consists of three levels) ,that bedrock of rural government has fostered more and more women participants and leaders.¹⁰⁰ several states like Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and most recently Uttarakhand have allotted not just the required seats of 33% of panchayat for women but also increased it to 50%. In Bihar it has seen that the spouses of women head of panchayats styling themselves as '*mukhiyapatis*'. Rajasthan also announced 50% reservation before 2010 panchayat election. Naturally the rise of Indian women as panchayat leaders is a remarkable and spectacular achievement because India has one of the worst records with respect to the way it treats the female sex as suppressed, violated and discriminated against; basically Indian women have the odds stacked against them. At the end women empowerment along with joint responsibilities of both male and female section is not only essential for emancipation of women, but also for the progress of human culture and civilization.

¹⁰⁰Chandrakala, Padia (Ed.) Feminism, Tradition and Modernity, IIAS, Simla, 2002, PP.36-54.

Chapter Five

Gender Discrimination and the Crisis of Morality

Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most of the abuser is a member of her own family. Increasingly, gender based violence is recognized as major public health concern and a violation of human rights.¹⁰¹

The effect of violence can be devastation to a woman's reproductive health as well as to other aspects of her physical and mental well-being.¹⁰² In addition to causing injury, violence increases women's long-term risk of a number of other health problems, including chronic pain, physical or sexual abuses are also at increased risk for unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Yet victims of violence who seek care from health professional often have needs that providers do not recognize, do not ask about, and do not know how to address.

Social justice is the keystone of the Indian constitution. In the eyes of constitution there is no discrimination between men and women. The Universal Declaration of human Rights 1948 affirms the idea of equal rights of men and women. The United Nations Rights 1948 affirms the idea of equal rights of men and women. The United

¹⁰¹ Zainab Rahman, "Women and Health", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication Delhi, 2005, PP.72-79.

¹⁰² Daborah L. Rhode, "Sex and Violence" In *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law*, Harvard University Press, 1991, P.230.

Nations proclaimed the year 1975 as international women's year for the abolition of discrimination. The U.N convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women violates the principle of equality of rights and respect of human dignity. The Fourth World Conference on Women 1995 unanimously declares the principal of non-discrimination and affirms faith in equal rights of men and women.¹⁰³ Global Women's March, 2000, against poverty and violence in India flagged off on the eve of international Women's Day by a group of women's organizations who met the Prime Minister of India and submitted their charter of demands to him. The delegation also presented the first copy of publication 'Women Speak: United Voices against Globalization, Poverty and Violence' to President K.R. Narayan. Year 2001 was celebrated as the **Empowerment Year of Women**. In spite of various rights guaranteed to women the discrimination against them has gone long way.

What is gender-based violence?

Violence against women and girls includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. It is often known as '**green-based**' violence because it evolved, in part, from women's subordinate status in society. Many cultures have beliefs, norms and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a

¹⁰³See Gopalan, Sarala, Towards Equality-The Unfinished Agenda- Status of Women in India-2001, National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

neighbour, or an acquaintance often goes unchallenged when men direct them at women, especially within the family.

Two of the most common forms of violence against women are abused by intimate male partners and coerced sex, whether it takes place in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Intimate partner abuse-also known as domestic violence,¹⁰⁴ wife beating, and battering is almost always accompanied by psychological abuse and in one-quarter to one-half of cases by forced sex as well. The majority of women who are abused by their partners are abused many times. In fact, an atmosphere of terror often permeates abusive relationships. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested, after every 56 minutes a woman is raped, in every 42 seconds a woman dies due to dowry deaths. Everyday approximately 200 girls are forced to enter in the prostitution.¹⁰⁵

Another form of violence is female feticide and female infanticide. Preference on son is one of the key aspects under-lining social values that create burdens on girls. Since child-hood she is enforced by secondary status in the family. Even she is not allowed to take birth because she is tested in the womb of mother.¹⁰⁶ In Haryana a famous old saying (*Chori mare bhagwan ki chora mare nirbhag ka*) means- ***A person is lucky if his daughter dies and a person in unlucky if his son dies.***

¹⁰⁴Daborah L. Rhode, "Domestic Violence", In *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law*, Harvard University Press, 1991, P.237.

¹⁰⁵ Leela Dube, "on the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Parliament India," *The Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. xxiii, No. 44, October 29, 1988, P. 15

¹⁰⁶ J. Gardiner, "Women's Domestic Labour", *New Left Review*, 89, 1975, PP.47-58.

Understanding the difference between women and men, and how they are determined, is of key importance in understanding why a gender perspective is so important for development and the elimination of world poverty. Difference between women and men are determined by biology on the one hand, and society on the other.

Sex marks the distinction between women and men as a result of the fundamental biological, physical and genetic difference between them. Convention and other social, economic, political and cultural forces set gender roles.¹⁰⁷

The precise boundary between these factors is the subject of fierce debate. Some people believe that the only important difference is that women can bear children and men cannot. Others believe that biology determines a much wider set of characteristics, attributes, and capabilities. Whatever the case, the wide variation in the position of women in different societies around the world demonstrates that, unlike sex, gender roles are by no means fixed by nature—they are made by people, and can be renegotiated and changed.

The position of women in society is far from being of academic interest alone. It not only has fundamental consequences for the quality of life of both women and men, but also has a direct impact on a society's prosperity and well-being. The government's policy on international development recognizes that gender-based

¹⁰⁷ Zainab Rahman, "Man-Woman Relations: Sex, Division of Labour, Stratification Based on Sex," In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP-38-47.

inequality is a major obstacle to the escape from poverty. Studies have shown that developing countries, which strive to ensure that women have equal rights, have higher rates of economic growth, lower mortality rates, smaller and healthier families, and a better educated population changing gender roles can make a world of difference.¹⁰⁸

The evidence also shows that gender equality is not a luxury that can only be afforded by rich countries. **UN data reveals that some developing countries can outperform countries scattered throughout the world, showing that culture and religion need not be barriers to the advancement of women.** Women are gaining ground in health and education terms, but still have a long way to go in sharing political and economic opportunities. They continue to suffer high levels of violence and abuse and in many countries and treated differently to men by the law. These disadvantages are not due to sex differences, but are the result of gender discrimination.

Empowerment, equality, and equity

Women's empowerment, gender equality and equity are key terms in debates about the changes required in the relationships between women and men. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society.

¹⁰⁸ZainabRahman, "Women and Development", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.112-121.

Equality means that women should have the same rights and entitlements as men to human, social, economic and cultural development, and equal voice in civil and political life. It does not mean that everyone should be the same or that everyone should show the benefits of development in exactly equal proportions. This would be neither feasible nor desirable, and would not be consistent with the notion of empowerment, which upholds everyone's right to determine their own future and the lifestyle of their choice.¹⁰⁹

Women and problems of gender discrimination

This point attempts to highlight the struggle of Indian women. Many of them face unequal relationships throughout their life, from family to polity; still the level of consciousness about these disparities varies according to their socio-economic background. Educated urban employed women are found to be more conscious about socio-economic inequalities. They have been the major beneficiaries of the development process.

While illiterate poor rural women and slum dwellers have their own struggle against socio-economic deprivations, it seems that women from sub-urban groups have, by and large, been marginalized by the development process. After independence, successive governments have passed social legislation to control social evils, yet social customs and behaviour responsible for these evils have not

¹⁰⁹See A.K. Pandey, *Emerging Issues in Empowerment of women*, New Delhi, Anmol Publishers, 2002.

changed significantly. Social legislation equipped the government to fight against female infanticide, child marriage, dowry harassment and widow burning; but they too have failed to change prevalent customs, superstitions and social taboos, and these practices, by and large, remain an integral part of Indian social behavior.¹¹⁰

Status of women in society denotes her position with respect to others in terms of rights and obligations. Sometimes, it is argued that women in India enjoy a very high status. In this context, constitutionals and legal provisions are cited and distinguished women in public offices are mentioned. Educated urban employed women are also included in this category. On the other hand, it is maintained that a lot of Indian women are very strenuous; therefore arguments in favour of reservations for women are justified. Illiterate women from rural areas and urban slum dwellers can be identified in this category. Though in terms of gender justice, Indian women cannot be treated as a homogeneous, region, caste, class and ethnic groups still largely they face in equal power relations throughout their life at different levels. Common experience of discriminatory behavior binds them with common thread. Educated employed women are more conscious of in equal distribution of resources from family to polity.¹¹¹ So they are more active in their quest of gender justice while their illiterate counterparts continue to suffer without such consciousness, universal suffrage and political participation have played

¹¹⁰Suneera Kapoor, "Status of Women in Indian Society: Empowering Women Through Legislation", Prem R. Bharadwaj (ed.) In *Gender Discrimination: The Politics of Women Empowerment*, Anamika Publishers, 2005. PP.139-144.

¹¹¹Zainab Rahman, "Women and Education", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.64-71.

limited role to improve socio-cultural status of marginalized women in absence of education and economic autonomy.¹¹² Discrimination against women is found in every culture and society in varying degrees. It is manifested in various domains of life and activity: economic, social, political and religious. As a result of gender discrimination, the status of women is subordinate to men and they have little access to education, food, nutrition, health care employment and wages.

The general oppression and subordinate position of women in human society over time and space constitutes an important perspective of human development. It has now been realized by the modern States all over the globe that comprehensive human development is not possible until the position of women in the family and society is improved. Specific development policies and programmes are thus being formed from time to time to improve physical, intellectual, economic, social and legal conditions of women. It is assumed that given certain special facilities in the spheres of economy, education, health care and legality women might gain the essential power in the domestic domain and, to actively participate in the public domain of human development.¹¹³ The difference between man and woman is conceptualized in terms of 'gender' that broadly refers to the cultural construction of the sexual difference between male and female in human society, and empowerment is a means to improve the positions of women by providing them

¹¹² See Neera Desai & Usha Thakur, *Women in Indian Society*, National Book Trust, India, 2001.

¹¹³ Martha C. Nussbaum, Jonathan Glover, *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995, PP.1-15.

material, intellectual and socio-political rights equal with men in the society and State. Women's empowerment is one of the aspects in the whole process of human development. It involves continuous provisioning of rights and privileges to the women by the State, and improving their life-situation to fight gender inequality. In this regard, we can particularly mention the initiatives taken by the State government of Bihar in recent past. Even though the people of Bihar are illiterate and educationally and economically backward in compare to most other states of India, but the initiatives taken by the Bihar government regarding women's empowerment is praiseworthy.

Problems of working women

Educated working women in India constitute an important segment of urban society. They have taken up work outside home both in formal as well as informal sector and have proved their skill and worth almost in every sphere of their working place.¹¹⁴ Yet cultural and structural constraints have hindered their path of progress. The notion of gender discrimination as perpetuated by patriarchy prohibits them to come at par with their male counterparts. Early socialization and role identification continue to confirm subordination of women in family as well as in society. Though increasing education and consequent impact of modernization and westernization is gradually reducing the gender differences. However,

¹¹⁴See World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work, United Nations, New York, 1999.

economic activity and productivity of women do not guarantee economic authority to her¹¹⁵

Education along with employment has facilitated women to move a few steps ahead in social hierarchy. Marxism also posits the suggestion that women will be liberated from the status of unpaid servant only with their full and equal entry into social production. Hence, it is contended that if women once are able to contribute to the family's cash income through economically productive work; this would lead to their status elevation. In reality, though education and employment have equipped women to be economically productive. Having said this, it appears that still this has not brought economic autonomy to women to a reasonable and optimal extent. Women are economically dependent on the head of the family. Working women rarely have controlled over their earnings and assets. Economic autonomy more or less identifies "self determination of individual women", 'the right to individual choice" or the extent of women's control in the participation of the economic resources of the family. It has to be cautioned that economic autonomy does not obtain if a person has a high income, it also requires the awareness of opportunities, which will enable a judicious distribution of family income on various wants to maximize its utility. Thus, education along with economic autonomy facilitates the development of individual identity.¹¹⁶ As a matter of fact the economic function has

¹¹⁵ Vincent J. Roseigno, "Discrimination in Public and Private Economic Sectors", In *The Face of Discrimination: How Race and Gender Impact Work and Home Lives*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, PP.74-89.

¹¹⁶ See Ram Ahuja, *Social Problems in India*, 2nd Edition, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2003.

been the joint responsibility of both sexes in all ages. Through the history of mankind women have been engaged in economic activities along with them. In Vedic period, women enjoyed a very high status in the field of intellect she was equal to man. She used to discuss political and social problems freely with man. After Vedic period, the position of women deteriorated considerably. She was treated as an appendage of man with a distinct and meekly accepted conception of her family duties, and obligations. This changed social image also affected women's authority. Even though, this position continued till the beginning of British period, however, the spread of English education, inter-mixture of Western and Eastern cultures and various Hindu revivalist organizations gave a great impetus to the awakening of womanhood.¹¹⁷ In the middle of 19th century the practice of Sati (widow burning) was abolished by law. In the 20th century *purdah* and *child marriage* were discarded and widow remarriage was encouraged. The Indian Reforms Act of 1921 enfranchised a small section of population and women were also included in this. Wifhood was made a qualification for voting, and some seats were especially reserved for women. The Indian Constitution envisaged socialistic pattern of society. Article 15 of the Constitution lays down that, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex". Thus, various acts were passed by Indian Parliament and ground for equality was prepared.

¹¹⁷ Mary R. Beard, *Woman as a Force in History: A Study in Traditional and Realities*, New York: collier, 1946, PP.114-115.

Although women were given equal opportunities, they still lag behind in availing them. Women are not only divided by gender and class with men only but also within their own sex.¹¹⁸ Gender identity is modified through a series of ideological representations. Gender identity is created in the family. In this way gender discrimination within the same gender also affects women's economic autonomy. Also, their participation in economically productive work has marginally improved their capacity to modify traditional social culture. The reasons of the powerlessness may be due to the hierarchical mode of socialization of female child and rigidity of traditional norms of patriarchal social structure. The goal of socialization of Indian girl is adaptation to the given conditions and to the will of others. She has never learnt to take decisions of her own, to contradict others, to refuse to give due respect to the bearers of authority. This early induction of female child gives her reality orientation to the roles demanded of her during life span and she tries to obey these demands. Consequently, she has to go through the roles of a disciplined daughter, a submissive daughter-in-law, a sacrificing mother and a dominant mother-in-law. Moreover, the attitudes of husband/in-laws and other family members affect the happiness of woman, if she lives in a joint family. However, she may have important consequences for her positions in society and the opportunities that are open to her. Although women recognize the practical advantages of its systems of division of labour, there is no doubt that in many cases joint family

¹¹⁸ Vincent J. Roscigno, "Sex Discrimination in Employment", In *The Face of Discrimination: How Race and Gender Impact Work and Home Lives*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, PP.40-57.

restricts the free movement of women outside the home, decision making in financial matters or running the household and even in the dress she may wear. It seems that women reject joint family because they do not want to suffer the traditional subordination or the authoritarian position of the in-laws, particularly the mother-in-law. But the nuclear family has its own problems. According to Goode's hypothesis, the ideal of conjugal family (consisting of husband, wife and their children) emancipates the individual from the domination of elders and the group is also by virtue of its egalitarian tendency the strongest instrument for the emancipation of women from male tutelage. The core of this ideology is the principle of equality of individual's irrespective of sex, race, caste and class.¹¹⁹ But when women exercise equal political, social and economic rights, the traditions of patriarchal norms come into conflict with the structure of conjugal family. Because, in the conjugal family also the principle of sex-based instrumental expressive, role distribution remains intact, which assigns to women the internal family sphere as their central field of action and not public life. In this way, women's autonomy is not compatible with the ideal of conjugal family. Within conjugal family women can realize only a few elements of egalitarian ideology but not the "right to all individual choice". Therefore, the radical ideology of conjugal is not radical enough. In urban nuclear family also the conjugal relationship has not yet developed a significant importance. Ultimately, these unequal and hierarchical sex roles operate in both the

¹¹⁹ Vincent J. Roscigno, "Race Discrimination in Employment". In *The face of Discrimination: How Race and Gender Impact Work and Home Lives*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, PP.19-21.

domains of family and economy. Family and economy are not separate spheres but are vitally interconnected.¹²⁰ In both the areas of family and economy patriarchy is an important affective factor. According to Eisenstein patriarchy and sexual division of labour is a process that cuts through family and economy. This distinguishes peoples' activities, goals, desires and dreams on the basis of gender division of labour. Similarly, according to the radical findings, "there exist patriarchal organizations in society determined essentially by a male hierarchical order they enjoy both economic and political power". Thus, patriarchy distinguishes the authority at home and outside and men enjoy greater economic authority than their female counterparts. But education, employment and consequent higher aspirations have given women the resources to increase confidence to transform the intra-family role relationships. Various studies have highlighted this fact that educated working women are better off than their non-working counterparts in some areas as health, education and material resources etc. They also enjoy greater authority than non-working women. Besides this, women's access to the family's economic resources seems to be of greater significance than their beginnings as earner.

Gender is considered as cultural construction on the difference of sex between male and female in human society and due to this kind of consideration it varies across class, caste, ethnic group, nation and states. In this context, Sherry Ortner's comments may be mentioned here. She says, 'the secondary status of women in

¹²⁰Neera Desai, Maitreyi Krishna Raj, "The Economy", In Women and Society in India, Ajanta Publication, India, 1987, P.46

society is one of true universals, a pan cultural fact. Yet within that universal fact, the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women are extraordinarily diverse and even mutually contradictory'. Sometimes scholars in this field engage themselves to find out how gender is constructed on structured through culture and to find out the way in which gender is related to economics, politics, kinship and ritual in different societies. Therefore gender came as a structuring principle of human society.¹²¹

Sex differences are grouped as male and female based on the human reproductive function. Gender is cultural. We find gender discrimination in all cultures because every culture imposes certain norms on the behavior of every one in society. Men, in most cultures, are described to be 'manly' meaning brave, assertive, vocal etc.; whereas women are expected to be tolerant, well-spoken and caring. Perhaps these roles were imposed for smooth running of the society. They may vary from culture to culture but it is important to note that these gender roles prescribed have always been discriminatory. Thus, due to natural, biological differences in sex, different gender roles are prescribed but this also symbolize discrimination or inequality and this inequality has always been disadvantageous for women.

Now the question arises why there is so much discussion about gender inequality and gender discrimination? A major question also arises out of co-existence of the

¹²¹ Sherry Ortner, Louise Lamphere, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (ed.) *"Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?"* In *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP. 44-67.

demand for equality with acceptance or celebration of difference. Women, who form more than half of population of the world, should be treated equally with men and human well-being can be achieved by well-being of women as well as of men. But we find that women have been discriminated against and thereby not treated equally. When we talk of gender inequality we appeal to *equality, justice and fairness*. But these concepts are quit complex and we hardly make any attempt to understand them clearly. Rendering justice is one of the prime aspects for human well-being. We also find that justice and equality are inseparable. If we want to reach justice, we have to talk of equality and inequality. Some inequalities are built-in in the concept of justice. Preferential treatment is a case in point. Some would consider preferential treatment is a form of injustice, a form of reverse discrimination. Thus, the need for differential treatment and unequal distribution is very much needed for justice. For example, criminals have to be treated differently; rich people of the society have to be treated differently.¹²² Considerations for merit, needs potentials, capabilities are some of the main considerations for rendering justice. Justice is also sometimes related with self-interest. Utilitarianism talks about 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' counting each person's happiness equally which includes men and women both. Equality means equality with difference. They are equal as human; they are equal as people; they are equal in capabilities and have equal rights. And to deny this is inequality. Equality does not mean sameness.

¹²²Neera Desai, Maithreyi Krishna Raj, "An Overview of the Status of Women in India", In *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publication, India, 1987, P.23.

Equality could only mean as having equal opportunity to decide and live according to their choice but unless one is aware of the options available to her one would not be able to exercise one's choice. Women need to be treated as capable as men of taking decisions regarding their own life, conceptions, birth, abortion etc. Yet the empirical conditions in which they are constructed make her a 'weaker sex' and she is treated as 'second sex'. The choices have to be free rational choice and she would be able to decide a way of living or action to gain her personhood. Indian tradition from early Vedic days, like many other traditions, has marked a preference for males over females. It is a part of scriptures, as individual entry into heaven is not allowed unless a male child performs his/her last rites. Hinduism teaches young girls to be like Sita, wife of mythological hero Rama, who always followed her husband. To a certain extent such religious teachings are responsible for status of women in society. *Manu Smriti*, defined the social role of women as one who is the subject to her father in childhood, in youth to her husband and when her husband is no more, to her sons. The only aim of her life is to obey and follow the commands of her lord. The place of women is always "inferior", and "subsidiary" to man in Indian society. On the other, Indian cultural symbols glorify the women's role as mother-goddess. She is the symbol of productivity and welfare. She is like *Durga*, *Kali*, *Saraswati* and *Lakshmi*, destructing all evils and spreading all goodness, nullifying wrong and the wrong doer. She is the divine energy, power, and fertility. Thus, we find two conflicting picture of women in India. On the one hand, she is always a second or last

choice and has to follow her father or brother or husband or son and has a low status in Indian society to the extent that her status became equivalent to *Shudra*. On the other, she is mother-goddess having a highest status. These conflicting pictures of women come very handy to the people who argue that there has been no gender discrimination and women have always had the highest place in Indian tradition. But we feel that this is a part of the larger game where women are ideally assigned some roles whereas in reality she is nowhere close to it.¹²³

The changing status of women

Indian society tries to combine the ancient civilization with the progress of modern times. So the picture of Indian women is different. Status of women in society denotes her position with others in terms of rights and obligations. In discussion on women's status in any society, the general convention has been to assess their roles in relation to men. Two other dimensions have also been introduced to facilitate such assessment: firstly, the extent of actual control enjoyed by women over their own lives and, secondly, the extent to which they have access to decision-making process and are effective in positions of power and authority. It has been found that very little serious attention has been devoted ¹²⁴to the systematic study of the position of women in Indian society. Thus, although anthropologists regarded the study of the "Position of Women" as one of their basic concerns from the very

¹²³Charag Husnul, "Suppression of Women through Sriptures", In Prem. R. Bharadwaj (ed.), *Gender Discrimination: The Politics of Women Empowerment*, Anamika Publishers, 2005, PP.120-124.

¹²⁴Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" In *Woman, Culture and Society* Stanford University Press, 1974, P.43

beginning and later on psychologists, demographers and several others have shared their interest, yet till their total output has remained rather inadequate. After the Second World War, feminists have started writing passionately on the subject. However, it is essential for men and women from different cultures and from different class and ethnic background to study the same social phenomenon.¹²⁵

Generally, two contradictory views exist about the status of women in society. Sometimes it has been argued that women in India enjoy a very high status, in this context constitutional and legal provisions are cited and distinguished women in high public offices are mentioned. Such description basically depends on the analysis of elite women. The other view, however, maintains that a lot of Indian women is very hard, and a representation was made not very long ago to the Backward Classes Commission that women, as a whole, should be treated a backward class in this country. These two views seem to be extreme while social reality lies somewhere in between.

Indian women cannot and should not be treated as a homogeneous, socio-cultural category, as they are divided on the basis of rural urban background, region, caste, class and ethnic groups. According to sociological perspective attention to the status of women should be paid, not merely as it is supposed to be in principle but

¹²⁵ See R Subramanian, *Gender Bias in India: The Importance of Household Fixed Assets*, Oxford Economic Papers, vol 48, No. 2, 1996.

especially as it is in practice.¹²⁶ Ideal of status of Indian women in past and constitutional and legal status of women in present times should not be confused with the restrictions from which they have suffered in past and are still suffering.¹²⁷

The constitution of India promises to secure all its citizens, justice, liberty, equality, and to promote fraternity among them all to realize the goals the constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights. Along with these, certain negative rights, prohibiting discrimination or denial of equal protection of law are also guaranteed. The Constitution recognized the Unequal Social Position of women and a special clause empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children even in violation of the obligation not to discriminate among citizens. Therefore, special laws have been enacted for the protection of women workers in factories, mines, and plantation; and to provide maternity relief of women workers in organized sector.¹²⁸ Thus, the Constitution envisaged a social revolution brought about through the use of law as an instrument of directed social change. Equality of opportunity in public employment and office has helped to ensure a significant position and status to urban, middle class, educated Indian women, demonstrated in increasing number of women in the public services and in position of political power and dignity. These provisions for women in Indian Constitution were result

¹²⁶ Mary R. Beard, *Woman as a Force in History: A Study in Traditional and Realities*, New York: Collier, 1946, PP.114-115.

¹²⁷ See Desai Neera & Thakkar Usha, "*Women in Indian Society*", National Book Trust, India, 2005.

¹²⁸ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Female Status in the Public Domain", In *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP.174-189.

of social reform movement, which began in 19th century emphasizing improvement of women's status. These reformers tried to achieve these objectives through social legislation. These social reformers agreed that no substantial social change could be achieved as long as women were deprived of opportunities of self-development and participation. However, majority of them saw women as custodians of the family and responsible for the well-being of children, inculcating in them the cultural values and very few of them thought in terms of women's rights to participate in social functions outside the family framework.

After independence, the government accepted suggestions of comprehensive reform of Hindu law. Though there was much resistance to the bill in the beginning front within and outside the congress. The opposition to bill proved that even those who framed the Constitution had not seriously appreciated the implication of Equality Clauses in the constitution. Thus, legal position of Hindu women has been improved considerably by the ban on bigamy, the provisions of right of divorce, and the right to inherit a share of parental property. However, similar reforms have not been taken place in all other systems of personal law in India. The Muslim women continue to be victims of polygamy, unilateral system of divorce and absence of maintenance provisions after divorce. The goal of uniform civil code mentioned in the Directive Principles of State policy is yet to be achieved.

However, these progressive laws are not practiced properly. Because most of the times people are not aware of these laws and they also have no urge to change their

lifestyles. In this context it can be said that though the Child Marriage Restraint Act and Dowry prohibition Act has been declared but these are being practiced in our society widely. Mass participation of people in violation of these laws are different levels also reveals the limitation of legal provisions in bringing out desired social change. Similarly, in 1956 Hindu Succession Act has been declared but it is not practiced positively as either woman is unconscious of these provisions or they are not interested to enjoy the rights. Any empirical enquiry above the efficacy of these legal provisions relating to women will reveal that, they are too radical in context of social reality and traditions.

These constitutional and legal provisions, should, thus be analyzed the context of prevailing social reality. In most Indian communities birth of a female child is still treated as *a curse and a financial liability*. Not long ago, practice of female infanticide was prevalent in many parts of the country. In traditional families still major goal for girls remains marriage. As a result total socialization process for most of the girl in largely confined to the traditional roles of women.

It is now accepted that within a household women have less or no control over resources. In our society gender inequality can be revealed by the female feticide, low female literacy rate, female infanticide, and unequal distribution of assets and women invisibility.

Gender inequality and development approaches

The constitution of India in its preamble granted the equal position and equal status for all citizens. In its "Directive Principles of the State Policy", it is stated that "The state shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing-(a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to adequate means of livelihood, (b) there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women". The constitution has also granted some "Fundamental Rights," which secures *justice, equal social status and equal opportunity for all*. These rights should be enjoyed by all irrespective of caste, creed and sex.¹²⁹ In spite of that, it is very unfortunate that in our country still now the situation of women is unforgivable. The women in our developing democratic India are identified as the weaker section. They are deprived of their basic right; suffer from social, political, economic injustices and male oppression ranging from physical abuse to immolation, even sexual exploitation. Thus even though in the eye of constitutional laws, women enjoy equal rights as men, but our socio-religious attitudes towards women actually makes a huge difference as far as the status of women in India is concerned. From the 19th century women's liberation movement was being spreading because at the time people was not in favour of existing social order and women also involved in this movement to get equality and liberty. This movement in the form of protest and formation of mass awareness has been able to create some amount pressure on society and government. These institutions (i.e.,

¹²⁹ R.K. Barik, "Women Rights in India: A Farce of Social Legislation" In Prem R. Bharadwaj (ed.), *Gender Discrimination: The Politics of Women Empowerment*, Anamika Publishers, 2005, PP.154-163.

govt. and society) also claim to support the cause of women's liberation and cleverly involve a limited number of women in decision-making process; yet no significant change has been noticed to wipe out or minimize the oppression of women. The goal of development is to raise the standard of living with a view to changing the quality of life of the people. No significant development could be made neglecting the woman who bear and rear the children and manage the household affairs. The gender inequality roots have penetrated into different aspects of human life and this inequality is affecting our development programmes.¹³⁰

Gender inequality in human life

There are gender inequalities in some of the major aspects of human life i.e., in social, political, economic, educational and health. The human life will be changed if these aspects are improved.

Gender inequality is not a new one. Due to the patriarchal social structure women have to suffer in every aspects of their life and basically they are used as the instrument of production. Biological satisfaction is the reason by which women are oppressed by men. It is said that the women should be sober and their behavior should be nice in front of others and they should be properly dressed but most of the advertising agencies are using *women as a commodity and tempting the society with various shameful advertisements*. In our societies women are deprived and

¹³⁰ See Preet Rustogi, *Gender Biases and Discrimination against women: What do different Indicators Say?* UNIFEM, New Delhi, 2003.

discriminated in various ways, in the village community women are not visible i.e., they are confined into the four walls of their home and they are not allowed to involve in any decision-making process.¹³¹ In rural area, especially in the Muslim community, women are not allowed to participate in outside manual work. Even in 21st century, people are blindly supporting the traditional beliefs and attitudes which are very much conservative. In his recent article published in the Telegraph paper, notable historian and modern writer Ramchandra Guha has claimed that patriarchy and religious stringent are two stumbling blocks of women's emancipation even in these days. Women are dominated by these past conservative traditional beliefs but they have the equal rights to their male conservative traditional beliefs. Moreover, they have the equal rights to their male counterparts to express their opinion for the welfare of society.

Dowry is a social evil. Though in 1961 "Dowry Prohibition Act" has been declared, yet it is practiced in our society nakedly and widely. Due to this crud illegal dowry system many newly married women's lives become miserable. "Daily demon of dowry devouring lives of young girls, who marry with high hopes of having heavenly abode in their husband's house. In few cases, guilty are punished but it has no deterrent effect on mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law who might have suffered similar

¹³¹Sangeeta Trama, "Women Empowerment-Divergence Between Theory and Practice", In Prem R. Bharadwaj (ed.), *Gender Discrimination: The Politics of Women Empowerment*, Anamika Publishers, 2005, PP.79-91.

cruelty/tyranny.¹³²This deep-rooted social evil requires to be controlled not only by effective implementation of the Dowry Prohibition Act, but also by the society. The society has to find out the ways and means of controlling and combating this menace of receipt and payment of dowry.¹³³ Instead of controlling paying and receipt of dowry in one or other form, it is increasing even in educated class. May be, it is increasing because same accumulation of unaccounted wealth with few and others having less means follow the same out of compulsion" [AIR 2002 SC 2830] (Supreme Court).

In the context of growing importance of science and technology, the economic development and prosperity of the people in a country depends largely on the level of education. The development of physical resources is linked up with the quality of human resource i.e., their levels of education and skills. One of the Directive principles of State policy contained in Article 45 of our constitution relates to education, according to which the state should strive to provide free and compulsory education to all children. Over and above, given the fact that education is one of the basic human rights of every human being irrespective of sex, age, creed, religion, colour, etc., the accessibility of education for women occupies prime importance. But due to various reasons, like increase in population, poverty, illiteracy etc., the Constitution and Directive has so far remained not yet completely

¹³² Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "why men rule primitive society", In *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, PP.244-263.

¹³³ Neera Desai, Krishna Raj, Maithreyi, "An Overview of the Status of Women in India", In *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publications, 1987, P.23.

fulfilled. Education enhances women's empowerment. Despite little improvement, the rate of drop-out is higher among girls when compared with boys, due to various reasons like early child marriage, girl child labour, general social attitude, poverty etc. To say the least, the progress in women's education in India is far from satisfactory. The gender gap in educational involvement though reduced over the years, is still a matter of great concern. The movements for improving women's status all over the world have emphasized the role of education. There is a link between the empowerment of women and their education and economic status. At present, women are not empowered in the economic, social, political areas and in the field of education. Hence, there is a need to empower them socially, economically and politically through education, capacity building, skill-development and improving awareness regarding various issues. ¹³⁴According to *Lakshmi Narayana and Rajesh (2002)*, "One of the strategies for the empowerment of women is education, that build a positive self-image and boosts self-confidence among them and develops their ability to think critically".

After 65 years of independence woman still remains the *secondary citizens of the country*. Today women are going within every field and every sphere of life i.e., successful engineers, doctors, pilots, teachers, businesswoman, planners managers, politicians and more successful house keepers. The numbers of participation is very low. Our social system, which is very conservative, does not allow them

¹³⁴ Deborah L. Rhode, "Education", In *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law*, Harvard University Press, 1991, P.288.

independency and decision making power. As Vina Majumdar, a noted women activist points out, "traditional values and behavioural norms bred through thousands of years inhibit them in asserting themselves as individuals except in very limited contexts. Divorce is still a social stigma, and a divorced woman has to face social and financial problems". Although family courts have been set up, but there is a danger that reconciliation between a husband and a wife will be brought at the cost of the interest of the wife. Indian planning has also failed to define the needs of women. Some concrete reforms are needed to improve the position of Indian women:

1. Women must be educated in schools, colleges and their work place would be against sexual harassment and eve teasing.
2. Women should be made equal partners in the national development programmes.
3. To reorient the attitudes of all persons connected with the law, relating to the principles of social justice.
4. Gender justice should be developed as a way of life and not mere as slogans.
5. Cultural barriers must be broken and human conscience should be developed toward gender justice.

6. Women must be aware of their rights. Legal literacy and human rights as a subject must be thought in the school.
7. Education is the key of developments; therefore, more girls must be encouraged to enroll in schools.
8. Last but not the least, to change the attitude, mindset and behaviours as no amount of law would cure gender bias perception, which has deeply settled in our mind.

Chapter Six

Feminism and Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism represents the union of the radical ecology movement, or what has been called 'deep ecology', and feminism. The word 'ecology' emerges from the biological science of natural environmental system. It examines how these natural communities function to sustain a healthy web of life and how they become disrupted, causing death to the plant and animal life. Human intervention is obviously one of the main causes of such disruption.¹³⁵ Thus, ecology emerged as a combined socio-economic and biological study in the late sixties to examine how human use of nature is causing pollution of soil, air and water and destruction of the natural system of plants and animals, threatening the base of life on which the human community itself depends. Deep ecology takes this study of social ecology as another step. It examines the symbolic, psychological and ethical patterns of destructive relations of human with nature and how to replace this with a life-affirming culture. Feminism also is a complex movement with many layers. It can be defined only as a movement within the liberal democratic societies for the full inclusion of women in political rights and economic access to employment. It can be defined more radical in a socialist and liberation tradition as a transformation of the patriarchal socio-economic system in which male domination of women is the

¹³⁵ Jim Cheney, "Eco-feminism and Deep Ecology", In *Environmental ethics*, Vo.9, Issue. (2), 1987, PP.115-145.

foundation of all socio-economic hierarchies. Feminism can be also studied in terms of culture and consciousness, the psychological and ethical connections of domination of women and male monopolization of resources and controlling power. This third level of feminist analysis connects closely with deep ecology.¹³⁶ Some would say that feminism is the primary expression of deep ecology yet, although many feminists may take a verbal connection between domination of women and domination of nature, the development of this connection in a broad historical, social, economic and cultural analysis is only just beginning.

Feminist environmentalism begins with noticing similarities and connections between forms and instances of human oppression, including the oppression of women, and the degradation of nature. A central position grounding eco-feminism is the belief that values, notions of reality, and social practices are related, and that forms of oppression and domination, however historically and culturally distinct, are interlocked and enmeshed. It follows that our strategies-both theoretical and practical for resisting oppressions must attend to those connections. Eco-feminism thus has been emerged as a very forceful approach in environmental ethics.

Eco-feminism is a social and political movement, which unities environmentalism and feminism with some current linking deep ecology and feminism. Eco-feminists argue that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and the

¹³⁶ Ariel Kay Salleh, Deeper than deep ecology: The eco-feminist connection, in *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 6 (4), 1984, PP.339-45.

degradation of nature and explore the intersectionality between sexism and the domination of nature, racism, specism and other characteristics of social inequality. Some current work emphasizes that the capitalist and patriarchal system is based on triple domination of the "southern people" (those people who live the Third World, the majority of which are south of the First world), women and nature.¹³⁷

Eco-feminist analysis

Eco-feminist or ecology feminism is a term coined in 1973 by Francoise d' Eaubonne.¹³⁸ It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking, and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the environment. It combines eco-anarchism or bioregional democracy with a strong ideal of feminism. Its advocates often emphasize the importance of interrelationship between humans, non-human others (e.g., animals and insects), and the earth.¹³⁹ A central tenet in eco-feminism states that male ownership of land lead to a dominator culture (patriarchy), manifesting itself in food export, overgrazing, the tragedy of the commons, exploitation of the people, and an abusive land ethic, in which animals and land are valued only as economic resources. Other eco-feminists explain how the degradation of nature contributes to the degradation of women. For example, Thomas-Slayter and

¹³⁷ Karen J. Warren, Jim Cheney, "Ecological feminism and ecosystem ecology", *Hypatia*, Vol. 6 (1), 1991, PP.179-97.

¹³⁸ See d' eaubonne, *Francoise. Le Feminisme ou la Mort*. Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974.

¹³⁹ Carol J. Adams, "Ecofeminism and the eating of animals," *Hypatia*, 1991. 6, PP. 125-145.

Rocheleau give detail how in Kenya, the capitalist driven export economy, has caused most of the agriculturally productive land to be used for monoculture cash crops. This leads to intensification of pesticide use, resource depletion and marginalization of the subsistence farmers, especially women, to the hillsides and the less productive land, where their deforestation and cultivation led to soil erosion, furthering the environmental degradation that hurts their own productivity (Thomas-Slayter, B. and D. Rocheleau (1995) *Gender, Environment and Development in Kenya: A grass roots perspective*).

Vandana Shiva makes it clear that one of the missions of eco-feminism is to redefine how societies look at productivity and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been deemed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used. For example, she draws a picture of a stream in a forest.¹⁴⁰ According to her, in our society it is perceived as unproductive if it is simply there, fulfilling the needs for water of women's families and communities, until engineers come along and think with it perhaps damming it and using it for generating hydropower. The same is true of a forest unless it is planted with a monoculture plantation of a commercial species.¹⁴¹ A forest may very well be productive, protecting ground water, creating oxygen, allowing villagers to harvest fruits, fuel and craft materials, and creating a habitat for animals that are also a valuable resource. However, for many, if it isn't for export

¹⁴⁰ See Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, London: Zed Books, 1988.

¹⁴¹ Deborah Slicer, "Your daughter or your dog? A feminist assessment of animal research issues", *Hypatia*, 6(1), 1991, PP.108-24.

or contribution to GDP without a dollar value attached, it cannot be seen as a productive resource.

Some eco-feminist point to the linguistic links between oppression of women and land such as the terms, "rape the land", "tame nature", and etcetera as also express nature as feminine (using the pronoun "she" and the term "mother nature") and women as "wild" and "untamed" (like nature). Eco-feminists also criticize Western lifestyle choices such as consuming food inherently requires ecological destruction.¹⁴²

Feminist and Social ecologist Jant Biehl has criticized eco-feminism as idealist, focusing too much on the idea of a mystical connection with nature and not enough on the actual condition of women. However, this line of criticism may not apply to many eco-feminists who reject mysticism and essentialist ideas about the connection between women and nature. This anti-essentialist eco-feminism has become more prominent since the early 1990s. It has an epistemological analysis of the Enlightenment, places the spirituality in immanent world and then practices modern activism. The materialist eco-feminism discusses economic and political issues and can use metaphorically the link of Great mother earth of Gaia (while the idealistic tendency uses it literally).

¹⁴² Catherine Roach, "Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-nature relation", *Hypatia*, Vol. 6(1), 1991, PP. 46-59.

Many feminists have argued that the goal of “women’s movement” and “the ecology (environmental) movement” are mutually reinforcing. Ultimately they involve the development of worldviews and practices that are not based on male-biased models of domination.¹⁴³ As Rosemary Ruether wrote in her book, *New Women/New Earth*:¹⁴⁴

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no
Solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental
Model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must
Unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the
Ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic
Socio-economic relations and the underlying values of this (modern
Industrial) society (204)

Since the early 1974, many feminists, especially ecological feminists (“eco-feminists”), have defended Reuther’s basic point: the environment is a feminist issue.

Eco-feminism is all about to answer the question of what makes the environment (ecology) a feminist issue? What are some of the alleged connect between the domination of women and the domination of nature? How and why is recognition of

¹⁴³ Marti Kheel, “The liberation of nature: A circular affair”, In *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 7 (2) .1985, PP.135-49.

¹⁴⁴ See Rose Mary Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist ideologies and Human Liberation*, Seabury Press, 1975.

these connections important to feminism, environmentalism and environmental philosophy?¹⁴⁵

Eco-feminism has different kinds of views. "Ecological feminism is the name given to a variety of positions that have roots in different feminist practices and philosophies. These different perspectives reflect not only different feminist perspectives (e.g., traditional, Marxist, radical, socialist, black and Third World). They also reflect different understandings of the nature and solution to pressing environmental problems. So, it is an open question how many, which, and on what grounds any of the various positions in environmental philosophy that acknowledge feminist concerns or claim to be feminist are properly identified as eco-feminist positions. What one takes to be a genuine eco-feminist position will depend largely on how one conceptualizes both feminism and eco-feminism."¹⁴⁶

For instance, if by "feminism" one means "liberal feminism", it builds on a Western liberal political and philosophical framework that idealizes a society in which autonomous individuals are provided maximal freedom to pursue their own interests. There are two main ecological indications of liberal feminism: the first draws the line of normal consider ability at humans, separating humans from nonhumans and basing any claims to moral consideration of nonhumans either on the alleged rights or interests of humans, or on the consequences of such

¹⁴⁵ Ynestra King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," In *Heresies #13 Feminism and Ecology*, vol.4 (1), 1981, PP.12-16.

¹⁴⁶ Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, "Feminism and ecology: on the domination of nature," *Hypatia*, 6 (1), 1991, PP.162-78.

consideration for human well-being .The second extends the line of moral considerably to qualified non-humans on the grounds that they are deserving of moral consideration in their own right. They, too, are rational, sentient, interest-carriers, right-holders. Whether the liberal feminist's ecological implication acceptable from an eco-feminist perspective or not actually depends on what one means by "eco-feminism". Many eco-feminists have argued that in so far as liberal feminism keeps intact oppressive and patriarchal ways of conceptualizing nature, including problematic human-nature dichotomies, it will be inadequate from an eco-feminist perspective.

If another construal of feminism is taken i.e. traditional Marxist feminism, it views the oppression of women as a kind of class oppression, a direct result of the institution of class, society and under capitalism, private property. Since praxis (i.e., conscious physical labour of human directed at transforming the material world to meet human needs) is the distinguishing characteristic of humans, traditional Marxist feminism, following traditional Marxism, would seem to suggest that the primary value of nature is its instrumental value in the production of economic goods to meet human needs .

Whether traditional Marxism fertile soil for eco-feminism or not, again it depends on what one means by eco-feminism. If eco-feminism is a position that recognizes that nature has value in addition to its use value to humans, or if eco-feminism asserts that more than gender-sensitive class analysis are needed to explain the

interwoven dominations of women and nature, then traditional Marxist feminism will be inadequate from an eco-feminist perspective.

Now we can consider the radical feminism. A radical feminist construal of feminism departs from both liberal feminism and traditional Marxist feminism by rooting women's operation in reproductive biology and sex-gender systems. According to radical feminists, patriarchy (i.e., the systematic operation of women by men) subordinates women in sex-specific ways by defining women as beings whose primary functions are either to bear and raise children or to satisfy male sexual desires. The liberation of women requires the dismantling of patriarchy, particularly male control of women's bodies.¹⁴⁷

Now the question arises: what is radical feminism eco-feminist? While radical feminist historically had the most to say about eco-feminism, sometimes claiming that "women are closer to nature than men", some eco-feminists have worried about the extent to which radical feminism both mystifies women's experience by locating women closer to nature than men, and offers a historically essentialist accounts of "women's experiences". Furthermore, some eco-feminists worry that any view that makes any group of humans closer to nature than any other is conceptually flawed and methodologically suspect: it maintains the sort of value dualistic and hierarchical thinking that is critiqued by eco-feminism. Hence the extent to which

¹⁴⁷Val Plumwood, "Ecofeminism: An overview and discussion of positions and arguments," *In Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 64, 1986. PP. 120-37.

radical feminism is an adequate theoretical basis for eco-feminism will depend partly on what one takes to be the defining characteristic of eco-feminism. Despite important differences among eco-feminists and the feminisms from which they gain their inspiration, there is something all eco-feminists agree about; such agreement provides a minimal condition account of eco-feminism: there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy.¹⁴⁸ A main project of eco-feminism is to make visible these “women-nature connections” and, where harmful to women and nature, to dismantle them.

Woman-nature connections

There are at least eight sorts of connections that eco feminists have identified. These alleged connections provide sometimes competing, sometimes mutually complementary or supportive analysis of the nature of the twin dominations women and nature. A causal, albeit philosophically uncritical, perusal of these eight alleged connections helps to identify the range and variety of eco-feminist positions on women-nature connections.¹⁴⁹

1. The connection between women and nature is historical. When historical data are used to generate theories concerning the sources of the dominations of

¹⁴⁸ Catherine Roach, “*Loving your mother: on the woman-nature relation*,” *Hypatia*, Vol. 6 (1), 1991, PP.46-59.

¹⁴⁹ See Ariel Kay Salleh, “*Living With Nature: Reciprocity or Control?*” In R. and J. Engel, *Ethics of Environmental and Development*, University of Arizona Press, 1990.

women and nature, it is also causal. So pervasive is the historical-causal theme in eco-feminist writing that Ariel Salleh practically defines eco-feminism in terms of it: 'Eco-feminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture'.

Some eco-feminists (e.g., Spretnak 1990, Eisler 1988, 1990) trace these connections to *prototypical patterns of domination* begun with the invasion of Indo-European societies by nomadic tribes from Eurasia about 4500 B.C. Riane Eisler describes the time before this invasion as a "matrifocal, matrilineal, peaceful agrarian era". Others trace historical connection to patriarchal dualisms and conceptions of rationality in classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition.¹⁵⁰

Conceptual connections

Many authors have argued that ultimately historical and causal links between the domination of women and nature are located in conceptual structures of domination that construct women and nature in male-biased ways. Basically such conceptual links have been offered.

One account locates a conceptual basis of the twin dominations of women and nature in value dualisms, i.e., in disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than as complementary) and as exclusive (rather than as

¹⁵⁰Stephanie Lahar, "Ecofeminist theory and grassroots politics," *Hypatia*, Vol.6 (1), 1991, PP.28-45.

inclusive), and value hierarchies, i.e., perceptions of diversity organized by a spatial Up-Down metaphor, which attributes higher value (status, prestige) to that which is higher ("Up"). Frequently cited examples of these hierarchically organized value dualisms include reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman dichotomies. These theorists argue that whatever is historically associated with emotion, body, nature, and women is regarded as inferior to that which is (historically) associated with reason, mind, culture, human (i.e., male) and men.¹⁵¹

A second account expands on the first by housing the problematic value dualisms and value hierarchies in larger, oppressive conceptual frameworks—ones that are common to all social "isms of domination" (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism as well as "naturism", i.e., the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature). A conceptual framework is a socially constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions that shapes and reflects how one views oneself and others. It is oppressive when it explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination subordination. An oppressive conceptual framework is patriarchal when it explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of women by men.

Oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks are characterized not only by value dualisms and hierarchies but also by "power-cover" conceptions of power and

¹⁵¹Ariel Kay Salleh, "Deeper than deep ecology: The eco-feminist connection," In *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 6 (4), 1984, pp. 339-45.

relationships of domination and logic of domination, i.e., a structure of argumentation that provides the moral premise that superiority justifies subordinations. On this view, it is oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks, and the behaviours that they give rise to, that sanction, maintain, and perpetuate the twin dominations of women and nature.¹⁵²

A third account locates a conceptual basis in sex-gender differences, particularly in differentiated personality formation or consciousness. The claim is that female bodily experiences (e.g., of reproduction and child bearing), not female biology situate women differently with respect to nature than men. This sex gender difference is allegedly revealed in a different consciousness in women than men toward nature; it is rooted conceptually in “paradigm” that are uncritically oriented to the dominant western masculine forms experiencing the world: The analytic, non-related, delightfully called ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ approaches-just those value dualisms that are embedded in different conceptualization structures and strategies (“different ways of knowing”), coping strategies and ways of relating to nature for women and men. A goal of eco-feminism then, is to develop gender-sensitive language, theory, and practices that do not further the exploitative experiences and habits of dissociated, male gender identified culture toward women and nature.¹⁵³

¹⁵²Karen J Warren, “The power and the promise of ecological feminism”, In *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 12 (2), 1990, PP.125-46.

¹⁵³Karen J. Warren, “Toward a feminist peace politics”, *Journal of Peace and Justice Studies*, vol. 3(1) 1991b, PP.87-102.

One project of eco-feminism is to expose and dismantle the conceptual structures of domination which have kept various "isms of domination", particularly the dominations of women and nature, in place. If eco-feminism who alleges various conceptual woman -nature connections are correct, this will involve reconceiving those mainstay philosophical notions which rely on them (e.g., notions of reason and rationality, knowledge, objectivity, ethics and the knowing, moral self).

Empirical and experimental connections

Many eco-feminists have focused on uncovering empirical evidence linking women (and children, people of colour, the underclass) with environmental destruction. Some point to various health and risk factors borne disproportionately by women children, racial minorities and the poor caused by the presence of low-level radiation, pesticides, toxins, and other pollutants. Others provide data to show that First World development policies result in policies and practices regarding food, forest, and water, which directly contribute to the inability of women to provide adequately for themselves and their families. Feminist animal rights scholars argue that factory farming, animal experimentation, hunting, and meat eating are tied to patriarchal concepts and practices. Some connect rape and pornography with male-gender identified abuse of both women and nature. Appeal to such empirical data is intended to document the very real, felt, lived "experimental" connections between

the dominations of women and nature and to motivate the need for joining together feminist critical analysis and environmental concerns.¹⁵⁴

Sometimes, however, the empirical and experimental connections between women and nature are intended to reveal important cultural and spiritual ties to the earth honoured and celebrated by women and indigenous people. This suggests that some women-nature connections are features of important symbol systems.

Symbolic connections

Some eco-feminists have explored the symbolic association and devaluation of women and nature that appears in religion, theology, art, and literature. Documenting such connections and making them integral to the project of eco-feminism is often heralded as eco-feminism's most promising contribution to the creation of liberating, life-affirming and post patriarchal world wives and earth-based spiritualities or theologies. Eco-feminism is then presented as offering alternative spiritual symbols, spiritualities or theologies, and even utopian societies. Appreciating such symbolic woman-nature connections involves understanding "the politics of women's spirituality".

Some theorists focus on language, particularly the symbolic connections between sexist and naturist language, i.e., language that interiorizes women and nonhuman nature by naturalizing women and feminizing nature. For example, there are

¹⁵⁴Karen J. Warren, "The power and the promise of ecological feminism", In *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 12 (2), 1990, pp.125-46.

concerns about whether sex-gendered language used to describe "Mother Nature" or simply a rationale for the continued subordination of women. There are concerns about connections between the language used to describe women, nature, and nuclear weaponry. Women are often describing in animal terms (e.g., as cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, pussycats, cats, bird-brains, hare-brains). Nature is often described in female and sexual terms: nature is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, and mined. Her "secrets" are "penetrated" and her "womb" is put into the services of the "man of science", "Virgim timber" is felled, cut down. "Fertile soil" is tilled and land that lies "fallow" is "barren", useless. The claim is that language that so feminizes nature and naturalizes women describes, reflects, and perpetuates the domination and inferiorization of both by failing to see the extent to which the twin dominations of women and nature (including animals) are, in fact, culturally analogous.¹⁵⁵

Epistemological connections

The various alleged historical, causal conceptual, empirical, and symbolic woman-nature connections have also motivated the need for new, eco-feminist epistemologies. Typically these emerging epistemologies build on scholarship currently under way in feminist philosophy, which challenges mainstream views of reason, rationality, knowledge, and the nature of the knower as Val Plumwood suggests that if one mistakenly construes environmental philosophy as only or

¹⁵⁵ See M. Crawford, *Talking Difference: On Gender and Language*, London: Sage, 1995.

primarily concerned with ethics, one will neglect "a key aspect of the overall problem, which is concerned with the definition of the human self as separate from nature, the connection between this and the instrumental view of nature, and broader political aspects of the critique of instrumentalism". For Plumwood, eco-feminist epistemologies must critique rationalism in the Western philosophical tradition and develop views of the ethical, knowing self that do not maintain perpetuate harmful value dualisms and hierarchies, particularly human-nature ones.

Political connections

Francoise d' Eaubonne introduced the term "eco-feminism" in 1974 to bring attention to women's potential for ecological revolution. Eco-feminism has always been a grassroots of political movement motivated by pressing pragmatic concerns. These range from issues of women's and environmental health, to science, development and technology, the treatment of animals, and peace, antinuclear, antimilitarist activism. The varieties of eco-feminist perspectives on the environment are properly seen as an attempt to take seriously such grassroots activism and political concerns by developing analyses of domination that explain, clarify, and guide that praxis.

Ethical connections

To date, most of the philosophical literature on women-nature connections has appeared in the area of environmental philosophy known as “environmental ethics”. The claims are that the interconnections among the conceptualizations and treatment of women, animals, and nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response. Minimally, the goal of eco-feminist environmental ethics is to develop theories and practices concerning humans and the natural environment that are not male-biased and provide a guide to action in the pre-feminist present. This may involve developing an eco-feminist ethic of care and appropriate reciprocity, eco-feminist kinship ethics; eco-feminist animal rights positions, an eco-feminist social ecology or eco-feminist bioregionalism. As Plumwood¹⁵⁶ and Warren claim in their essays that the mainstream environmental ethics is inadequate to the extent that it is problematically anthropocentric or hopelessly andocentric.

Theoretical connections

The varieties of alleged women- nature connections discussed above have generated different, sometimes competing, theoretical positions in all areas of feminist and environmental philosophy. In many respects, contemporary environmental ethics reflects the range of positions in contemporary philosophical ethics. The latter includes traditional consequentialist (e.g., ethical egoist, utilitarian) and non-

¹⁵⁶ Val Plumwood, “Nature, self, and gender: feminism, environmental philosophy and the critique of rationalism” In *Hypatia*, Vol. 6 (1), 1991, PP. 3-37.

consequentialist or deontological (e.g., Kantian, rights-based, virtue-based) positions, as well as challenges to them by non-traditional (e.g., some feminist, existentialist, Marxist, Afrocentric, non-Western) approaches. Such is also the case in environmental ethics. There are consequentiality (e.g., ethical egoist, eco-utilitarian, and utilitarian-based animal liberation ethics) and non-consequentialist (e.g., rights-based animal liberation, stewardship ethics) approaches that extend traditional ethical considerations to include animals and the nonhuman environment. There also are nontraditional approaches (e.g., holistic Leopoldian land ethics, social ecology, deep ecology, ecological feminism) that raise considerations underplayed or omitted entirely from mainstream philosophical ethics. Feminists who address environmental issues can be found advocating positions within this broad philosophical range. So, the question rises that where can ecological feminists be fit?

Where one links ecological feminists fit in will depend largely on what one means by "ecological feminism". If ecological feminism is an umbrella term for any feminism that raises feminist concerns about the environment, then presumably eco-feminists can be found along the continuum of feminist-inspired and advocated environmental ethics. If, however, the term "ecological feminism " is used as the name for a variety of positions expressly committed to exploring woman-nature connections and to developing feminist and environmental philosophies based on

these insights, then ecological feminism is best viewed as one of several nontraditional approaches to environmental ethics and philosophy.

Chapter VII

Empowerment of Women

Human civilization has been undergoing steady and systematic changes over the years. Changes has become an inevitable aspect of modern living and any dynamic society must accept changes and generate the necessary potential to promote them further. Modern life has been complex faster, richer and varied in character.

India is a paradox in many ways. It is rich in natural resources, possesses a thriving industry and has a large pool of technical manpower but the large mass of its people are illiterate and poverty stricken and terms of human debt indices, it is among the worst-off nations. The goal is not an unrealistic one. Extrapolating from current growth rates, trends and suggestion various improvement and directions to boost debt show that India can soon be well on the way to providing our citizens with a decent standard of living. "India started well enough after independence, that is why we are able to produce enough food for our growing population through the green revolution although many international experts scoffed at the notion that India could ever be without a begging bowl"(Abdul Kalam-1998).¹⁵⁷

Our country suffers from the two greatest evils, the oppression of women and the exploitation of the poor. Real development would dawn on our country only with

¹⁵⁷ APJ. Abdul Kalam and Rajan, Y.S., *India2020-A vision for the new millennium*. Viking Penguin Books India (p) Ltd., New Delhi, 1998.

the emancipation of women and awakening of masses. Emancipation of women is nothing but giving power or authority to act independently. This freedom for women needs empowerment. To emancipate women, they must be empowered first. Empowerment of women must be an integral part of sustainable human development as women are the centre of attraction today. Emancipation of women is a process of economic and social activities that may alter the position, participation and performance of women.¹⁵⁸ So, to develop a nation an important prerequisite is the development of its women. Women are well developed only when they are empowered. To empower women is to provide some status to them. These are the educational status, economic status, financial status, social status, political status and occupational status etc. India has been among the less literate society among the world.¹⁵⁹ The opportunities for education were not open to all sections of the society even in British days. If the spirit of the age demands equality, the primary necessity is to provide education, which can only lead to economic well-being. Though women have suffered from the culture and nature of the Indian society with the economic and social inequalities, yet it is true that in the pre-independent and in the post-independent, Indian women enjoyed several rights and privileges. But most of them being illiterate and living in villages were hardly aware of the rights and privileges provided to them by the constitution.

¹⁵⁸ Zainab Rahman, "Women's Empowerment", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.122-133.

¹⁵⁹ Marilee Karl, "Participation in Politics", In *Women and empowerment: participation and decision making*, Zed Books, 1995, PP.59.

Modern economists give much importance on Human Resource Development. As far as economic growth and development are concerned, the contributions made by human beings are significant. In a highly progressive country like Japan, human capital is regarded as the real asset, particularly their women. To remove economic backwardness and instill the capacities and motivations to progress, it is necessary to increase the knowledge and skills of women. In fact, without an improvement in the quality of human factor, no progress is possible in the developed country.¹⁶⁰

It is an accepted fact that a woman plays a matchless role in the progress of a man and the family. She is the *Jeevan Shakti* of the family. The family, the society and even the country can draw valuable benefits from a woman. She assumes the role of the leading force and a balancing factor in the society. The fraternal fragrance, which emanates from a woman in country, is endowed with the propensity to make her dependents dynamic and economically prudent.

But it has been a long time that the status of women was different from that of men in terms of their roles and responsibilities both in family and the society. Most of their tasks and responsibilities had been undervalued. They are to spend their times and energy in unpaid domestic work which are not given much value. On the other hand, a male is considered as a guarantee of power, prestige authority and responsibility in the family and society. This discrimination against women

¹⁶⁰Hajira Kumar, "Women: Their Power and Powerlessness", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005. P.3.

adversely affects the distribution of economic and political powers throughout the world.

The constitution of India has explicitly conferred on women equal rights and opportunities i.e., the political, economic, social and educational equal to men. But because of superstitions, exploitation and oppressive traditions, a great majority of Indian women are not allowed to enjoy the facilities, rights and opportunities bestowed upon them. Now women are becoming more and more conscious of their constitutional as well as social rights. This consciousness has awakened in them a sense of urgency in experiencing equality and social justice. However, to feel equal rights and status government should seek appropriate ways and means to ensure that public and private enterprises share the responsibilities.

The preamble of Indian constitution ensures securing to all citizens of India equality of status and of opportunity as well as justice-social, economic and political. One of the directive principles of state policy prescribes that the state should direct its policy. Directive principles are fundamental in the governance of the country and are to be applied in enacting legislation, they are not judicially enforceable. After having laid down that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on ground of sex, among other things, it provides that nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children, so there is constitutional provision in India permitting the state to discriminate in favour of women, if such discrimination is found necessary. Women claim to be the largest

minority in India with a variety of social and economic disabilities, which prevent them from exercising their human rights and freedoms in society.¹⁶¹

The schemes launched by the government could not solve the problem of unemployment and the personnel entrusted with the job of implementation of the programmes were never keen to ameliorate schemes. Though the upliftment of poor is an arduous task, the government and bureaucracy lacked the strong determinations needed for sustained effects. All the schemes launched right from the community Development Programme down to the Food for work programme failed to improve the life-conditions of the agricultural labourers. The government has benefited only the privileged sections of the society. As consequence, the agricultural laboureres still remained poor and their dependence on labour power increased enormously in the recent years.¹⁶²

The lower status of women led to their oppression in two ways.

1. Oppression outside the family, and
2. Oppression within the family.

A large number of women in the rural areas, like their men folk, depend upon their daily wages earned in agriculture without holding any type of assets to their

¹⁶¹Hajira 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.

¹⁶² See K. Shanti, *Empowerment of Women*, Anmol Publications New Delhi, 1998.

credit.¹⁶³ Due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, they in the absence of skill resort to make wide shift both in the occupation and place of work. Though they work hard for long hours; they are paid bondage bearing the burden of indebtedness. Yet they continue to depend on the landowners for employment and loans. Thus, their dependence on agriculture makes the landlords utilize freely the services of all the members of the families of these labourers for increasing his assets.

The institution of patriarchy, strong culture factor related to the super-structure of the society, has survived the course of history and is being adopted with little change in its basic character by various social formations. The system of patriarchy, though co-exists with different modes of production the class structure and society as a whole, is somewhat autonomous. The sexual division of labour and the master-slave relationship between man and woman form the structure of the family life. The factors like the age-old household drudgery, bringing up children, cooking, washing and cleaning increased the burden of women in general and the female workers in particular. Addiction of men to alcohol, and beating wives further multiplied women's hardships. Hence the sphere of her oppression becomes total on her mental capacities, labour power, and her body and finally on her own self. With regards to women, the government has proposed organizing *Mahila Mandals* in the rural areas so that women could mobilize, and kept informed about their rights, if

¹⁶³ See Veena Majumdar and Indu Agnihotri, *Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement 1970s-1990s in EPW*, 1995.

possible. Exactly on the parallel lines there is also a general awakening the agricultural labourers to get them organized and united to solve their problems.

It was felt that without active participation of women no developmental program would be successful. The government functionaries, however, efficient and dedicated, can only act as catalytic agents and make women help themselves. Women had been paralyzed by denial of basic rights and subjected to social oppression. Both the central social Welfare Board and Department of Community development opined that the proper agency for uplifting them would be a committee of local women namely Mahila Mandal.

Thus, a major programme for the development of women in rural Indian was firstly conceived at the time of introduction of the Community Development Programme in 1952. It made a modest beginning when the rural women were encouraged to form women's club, which came to be known as *Mahila Mandal* in most of the states.

The concept of *Mahila Mandal* has originally emerged as a free formal association of urban middle class women. The government has tried this concept for a different purpose in the rural areas. Though it was felt that women should assemble regularly to learn from each other and also from the worker appointed by the government, the basic idea is to create opportunities for the rural women to improve their status. The main objectives of organizing the rural women of all castes and religious through the *Mahila Mandals* are:

- (1) Helping the women to participate in the developmental programmes;
- (2) Imparting social and political knowledge to women;
- (3) Establishing and running free maternity and child welfare centres;
- (4) Creating interest in women to work for the welfare of all people;
- (5) Developing leadership qualities among them; and
- (6) Promoting recreation like organizing holiday campus for women.

Perspectives of empowerment of women in India

Empowerment of women is gaining added significance in the Indian context owing to their greater participation in developmental activities. Women empowerment cannot be rigidly defined, particularly, in a situation like ours, where there exists a lot of difference among women in different sectors such as rural v/s urban women; women in organized sector v/s women in unorganized sector or informal sector; educated women v/s uneducated women, both in rural and urban sectors; and women belonging to lower level income group v/s those belonging to higher income group. Above all, one finds glaring differences between women belonging to upper caste, class and religious those belonging to lower classes. All these differences cited above is crucial factors to reckon with before anyone attempts to define the concept of empowerment of women and then analyzing the determinants of the same.

In other words, empowerment is influenced by a host of socio-economic, political and cultural factors. Socio-economic status would therefore be a ranking of an

individual by the society he/she lives in, in terms of his/her material belongings and cultural possessions along with the degree of respect, power and influence he/she wields.

Women in globalization

In the past, poor women's lives were nothing but the stories of pain, suffering humiliation and broken dreams. The recent and rapid change in women's role and responsibilities has shown that if women are properly guided towards productive and useful skills, they can be a formidable resource for national development. Any exploited society needs urgent correction. A woman is both valuable and almost inevitable. The nineties was the decade of the women. There is no avenue she had not trodden on, no obstacle she had not overcome and no job that was still taboo for her. Today's woman has secured every place, both literally and figuratively. The transformation in the social scene that has enabled women to rightly take their place pouring into the economy an immense flow of brain, power and energy, the changes can be felt by seeing the growing status of women. The level of economic equality and independence are the real indications to measure the status of women in advanced society. She alone knows how to save the erring from humiliation, how to educate disadvantaged children and many such things. Women are needed in all spheres of life and living. The declaration of the year 1975' as the international women's year' and 'the period 1976-85' as the 'International Decade of Women' and several national and international conferences reflect the concern shared globally

on the status of women. On November, 1, 1995, the world poverty day, it was estimated that women comprise almost 70% of the, more than 1.3 billion, poor in the world. So any economic upliftment policy that targets the poor has to specifically target women. The implication is that development should ultimately become a process of empowerment of women. The empowerment process encompasses severely mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by 'economic independence', which implies access to and control over production resources. Another component of empowerment is 'knowledge and awareness', the third is 'self-image' and the final is 'autonomy'. If we go through the world history then we will be able to notice that the first woman to climb Mount Everest is Mrs. Junko Tabei from Japan. 19 years old Gertrude Ederly was the first woman to swim the English Channel in 1926. An American lady Anne Bancroft was the first woman to reach North Pole of the World. Kalpana Chawla is the first Asian woman to go to space.¹⁶⁴

Women also did not neglect politics. Sirimavo Bandaranayake was the first woman Prime Minister in the world. Finland in Europe was the first country to elect women as members of Parliament. A Research Chemist in an industry became Prime Minister of England called Margaret Thatcher. Queen Victoria ruled Great Britain for a long period of 64 years. A remarkable woman, Princess Diana, captivated the hearts of people all over the world. The great woman Madam Curie won Nobel Prize twice.

¹⁶⁴ See Rajkumari Chandrasekhar, *what is the need for women?* Anmol Publications Pvt., New Delhi, 1998.

A humble woman Florence Nightingale organized the modern system of nursing. The first woman to receive a pilot's licence was Baroness de Laroche of France. Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman cosmonaut. The above statements vividly express the view that women are actively taking part in all economic, social, cultural and political events both directly and indirectly. They are part of the society who is active enough to be recognized by others as members of the society. Such an element cannot be neglected on any grounds. But still women are in the back pages and in most of the societies they are treated as an entity or as a sexual object. After identifying the position of women, it is realized that empowerment of women is important because the benefits will be felt not only by the women themselves but by their households as well. It may look like a more enlightened approach to ensure the empowerment of women but the returns to their families and even the societies as a whole will be worth it. But the question arises that why women as a group distinguished from the mass are including both men and women, it is mainly for the reason that women are systematically excluded from the full economic and political participation in the production and benefits of development. But the responsibilities for women to contribute to the household food security and also meet the other needs of the family are increasing without giving them greater access of resources to meet these needs. All the women may not be included under this consideration but only the women who are poor in resources and lack the ability to improve their standard of living. It is a fact that women need empowerment and

they may be benefited and become more productive if empowered. Women make up 50 percent of the world's population, comprise 33 percent of the official labour force, perform nearly 66.6 percent of all working hours, and receive 10 percent of the world's property. Woman has been developing within herself an image of self-sacrificing person devoid of any individuality with the role of a slave or servant obeying only the order of her master. But today, power and empowerment are concepts that are of considerable importance to people throughout the globe. The concept of human development has assumed the centre stage in a number of world summits and global conferences. Particularly the Vienna Conference urged the eradication of all forms discrimination against women.

A profile on women population and employment

Going by the census reports, it is found that the total population increased by 23.56% per unit at the All India level between 1981 and 1991. The female population increased by 26.5% at the National level during the above period. Rural population was around 74.26 at the National level respectively as per the census 2001 rural population at the National level. As regards rural female population, it was 36% at All India and 32.6% at the State Level and the same declined to 34% at the national level in 2001.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ See Census Reports (1981-2001).

Viewed in terms of workers, one finds some instructive changes as regards the composition of rural urban workers is concerned during the two decades between 1971 and 1991. It is found that rural population as a percentage of total increased from 35.50% to 40.24% between 1981 and 1991, at the National level.

Between male and female workers, there has been consistent increase in rural female workers, from 16% in 1971 to 23% in 1981 and to 27% in 1991, as against the increase in urban workers of 7%, 8% and 9.7% during the same periods. Another important aspect is that the population of female workers to male workers has also increased sizably. It was around 1:0.3 in 1971, but surged to 1:0.5 in 1991. However, female workers as a percentage of total female population have actually declined over the years.

Another dimension is the analysis of workers by the industrial categories. It is found that the workers get concentrated only in the category of cultivators (34%) agricultural labourers (45%) and in miscellaneous services to the tune of 7 to 8%

Table-1**Census Reports (1981-2001) All India**

Population	1981	1991	2001
Total(million)	683.33	844.32	1027.02
Male	349.93	437.81	531.28
Female	321.35	406.48	495.74
Decennial growth rate (1971-1981)	24.66	23.56	21.34
Sex ratio (female/1000male)	933.00	929.00	933.00
Rural	951.00	941.00	-
Urban	818.00	813.00	33.00
Rural Population	525.00	627.00	718.87
Male	269.00	323.00	370.76
Female	256.00	304.00	348.11
% age of total rural population	76.70	74.30	69.99

Source: census 1991 and 2001 (provisional figures)

Composition of male and female workers in India (% of total population)

		Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1971	Total	34.17	52.75	14.22
	Rural	35.33	53.78	15.92
	Urban	29.61	48.88	7.18
1981	Total	36.60	52.62	19.67
	Rural	38.79	53.77	23.06
	Urban	29.99	49.66	8.31
1991	Total	37.68	51.56	22.73
	Rural	40.24	52.50	27.20
	Urban	30.44	48.95	9.74
2001	Total	38.66	26.68	11.98

Some steps for the empowerment of women

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive principles. The constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt steps in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year plan (1974-78) onwards a drastic

change has been marked of in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.¹⁶⁶

The National Commission for Women was set up by an act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for action (1995) and the outcome Document adopted by the UNGA session on Gender Equality and Development and peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶See Gita Sen and Srilatha Battiwala., *Empowering Women for Reproductive Right*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

¹⁶⁷ See India: *Alternative NGO Report on CEDAW. Initial Submission to the CEDAW Committee, NAWO*, January, 2000.

The policy also takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Year Plan and the other sectoral policies relating to empowerment of women. The Women's movements and a widespread network of non-government organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the status of women in India, "Towards Equality" and highlighted in the National perspective Plan for women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the platform for Action, Five Years after an assessment".

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country.¹⁶⁸

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.

¹⁶⁸Sushma Sahay, "Why Empower Women?" In *women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, P.1.

Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector to education, health and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

Objectives

The goal of this is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specially, the objectives of this policy include.

- 1) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- 2) The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom, by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- 3) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- 4) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.

- 5) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- 6) Changing social attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- 7) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- 8) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- 9) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.¹⁶⁹

Judicial legal systems

Legal-judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault new laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offences. At the initiative of and with the full participation of all stakeholders including community and religious leaders, the policy would aim to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women.

¹⁶⁹Hajira Kumar, "Human Rights and other International Efforts for Women's Empowerment", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, PP.273-310.

The evolution of property rights in a patriarchal system has contributed to the subordinate status of women. The policy would aim to encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance by evolving consensus in order to make them gender just.

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, and also the advisory commissions, committee boards, trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies will be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the development process.¹⁷⁰

Policies, programmes and systems will be established to ensure mainstreaming of women's perspectives in all developmental process, as catalysts, participants and recipients. Wherever there are gaps in policies and programmes, women specific interventions would be undertaken to bridge these. Coordinating and monitoring mechanisms will also be devised to assess from time to time the progress of such

¹⁷⁰Sushma Sahay, "Organising Women for Empowerment", *In Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, 1998, PP.40-69.

mainstreaming mechanisms. Women's issues and concerns as a result will specially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, sectoral policies, plans and programs of action.

Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programs will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. There will be improved implementation of programs which are already women oriented with special targets for women. Steps will be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹Hajira Kumar, "Economic Empowerment of Women", In *Women's empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies- a Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, P.192.

Women's perspectives will be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers will be recognized in the formal and informal sectors (including home based workers) and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions will be drawn up. Such measures could include:

- 1) Reinterpretation and redefinition of conventional concepts of work wherever necessary e.g., in the census records, to reflect women's contribution as producers and workers.
- 2) Preparation of satellite and national accounts.
- 3) Development of appropriate methodologies for undertaking (1) and (2) above.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of women and child development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment

especially in the informal economy and rural areas.¹⁷² Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.

In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers concentrated efforts should be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programs should reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programs for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fishers etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.

The important role-played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing and agro industry and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They should be given comprehensive support in terms of labour legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors.

Women, at present, cannot work at night in factories even if they wish, suitable measures should be taken which would enable them to work on the night shift in factories.

¹⁷² M.K Rao, "Factors Influencing the Participation of Females", In *Empowerment of Women in India*, Discovery Publishing House, 2005, PP.41-88.

The provisions of support services for women like child care facilities, including crèches at work places and educational institutions, homes for the aged and the disabled should be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure their full cooperation in social, political and economic life. Women friendly personnel policies should also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational systems, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be then a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies can be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes/other backward classes/minorities.¹⁷³ Gender sensitive curricula can develop at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services should be adopted and special attention should be given to the needs of

¹⁷³ Hajira Kumar, "Legal Support for Women Empowerment in India", In *Women's empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies- a Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, P.249.

women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a priority concern. This policy reiterates the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate (IMR); Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) set out in the national population policy 2000. Women should have access to comprehensive affordable and quality health care. Measures will be adopted that take into account the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise informed choices their vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, TB, and water borne diseases as well as hypertension and cardio-pulmonary diseases. The social, developmental health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective.

To effectively meet problems of infant and maternal mortality and early marriages the availability of good and accurate data at micro level on deaths, birth and marriage is required. Strict implementation of registration of births and deaths should be ensured and registration of marriages would be made compulsory. In accordance with the commitment of the national population policy (2000) to population stabilization, this policy will recognize the critical need of men and women to have access to safe effective and affordable methods of family planning of their choice and the need to suitably address the issues of early marriages and spacing of children. Interventions such as spread of education, compulsory

registration of marriage and special programs should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that child marriages are eliminated especially in rural areas. Women's traditional knowledge about health care and nutrition will be recognized through proper documentation and its use should be encouraged. The use of Indian and alternative systems of medicine should be enhanced within the framework of overall health infrastructure available for women.¹⁷⁴

In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase focused attention should be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. This is also important in view of the critical link between the health of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children. Special efforts should be made to tackle the problem of macro and micronutrient deficiencies especially amongst pregnant and lactating women as it leads to various diseases and disabilities. Intra-household discrimination in nutritional matters vis-à-vis girls and women should be sought to be ended through appropriate strategies. Widespread use of nutrition education should be made to address the issues of intra-household imbalances in nutrition and the social needs of pregnant and lactating women. Women's participation should also be ensured in the planning, superintendence and delivery the system.

¹⁷⁴Sushma Sahay, "Frame work for Women's Empowerment", In *Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, 1998, PP.18-39.

Special attention should be given to the needs of women in the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation within accessible reach and households, especially in rural areas and urban slums. Women's participation should be ensured in the planning, delivery and maintenance of such services.

Women's perspectives should be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both rural and urban areas. Special attention should be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single women, heads of households, working women, student's apprentices and trainees.¹⁷⁵

Women will be involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programs for environment, conservation and restoration. Considering the impact of environmental factors on their livelihoods, women's participation should be ensured in the conservation of the environment and control of environmental degradation. The vast majority of rural women still depends on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. In order to ensure the efficient use of these energy resources in an environmental friendly manner, the policy will aim at promoting the programs of non-conventional energy resources. Women will be involved in spreading the use of solar energy,

¹⁷⁵ See M.L. Andersen, *Thinking about Women: Sociological and feminist Perspectives*. 2nd ed., New York: Macmillan, 1988.

biogas, smokeless chaulahs and other rural application so as to have a visible impact of these measures in influencing ecosystem and in changing the life styles of rural women.

Programs should be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness should also be stepped up. Special measures should be taken for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery should be given a special focus too.

In recognition of the diversity of women's situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of especially disadvantaged groups, measures and programs should be undertaken to provide them with special assistance.¹⁷⁶ These groups include women in extreme poverty, destitute women, and women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

¹⁷⁶Srilatha Batliwala, *The Meaning of Women's Empowerment*, women's World, 1995, PP.23-34.

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.¹⁷⁷ 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 19th 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

¹⁷⁷ 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.¹⁷⁸ 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.¹⁷⁹ 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.¹⁸⁰

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

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

¹⁷⁹ Veder Porichay, P.200.

¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸¹ 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

¹⁸¹Zainab 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.¹⁸² 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,

¹⁸²Zainab 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.¹⁸³

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.¹⁸⁴ 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.¹⁸⁵ 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

¹⁸³ See N. Andal, *Women and Indian Society*, Rawat Publications, 2002.

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

¹⁸⁵ 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.¹⁸⁶

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 20th century under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Indian women played an important role.¹⁸⁷ 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 73rd 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.

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

¹⁸⁷ 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.¹⁸⁸

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.¹⁸⁹

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

¹⁸⁹ 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.¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹¹

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

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

¹⁹¹ 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.¹⁹²

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

¹⁹² 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.¹⁹³ 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’¹⁹⁴ 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

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

¹⁹⁴ 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.¹⁹⁵

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

¹⁹⁵ 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?"¹⁹⁶ To Sri Aurobindo a woman is a mother goddess, she is *sakti* of the divinity-through its manifestation the world is originated, maintained

¹⁹⁶Pushpa Joshi, *Gandhi on Women*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1988, P.149.

and destroyed. Aurobindo believes that in each woman mother lives.¹⁹⁷ Swami Vivekananda's thought on women has given a way to understand women as a human soul, not as sex only.¹⁹⁸ 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.¹⁹⁹

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?

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

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

¹⁹⁹ 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.²⁰⁰ 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.²⁰¹ 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’.²⁰²

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

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

²⁰¹Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Vivekananda*, vol.7, Advaita Ashram, P.378

²⁰²Swami 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 21st 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. 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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.

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