

SOCIETY AND ROLE OF WOMEN

Being a boy or a girl is an important part of one's identity. The society we grow up in teaches us what kind of behavior is acceptable for girls and boys, what boys can or cannot do. We often grow up thinking that these things are exactly the same everywhere. But do all societies look at boys and girls in the same way? we will try and answer this question in this chapter. We will also look at how the different roles assigned to boys and girls prepare them for their future roles, the roles men play and work they do. This chapter will also examine how inequalities between men and women emerge in the area of work.

We also realize that societies make clear distinctions between boys and girls. This begins from a very young age. For example, given different toys to play with. Boys are usually given cars to play with and girls dolls. Both toys can be a lot of fun to play with why are girls then given dolls and boys cars? Toys become a way of telling children that they have different futures when they become men and women. If we think about it, this difference is created in the smallest and most everyday things. How girls must speak softly or boys need to be tough. All these are ways of telling children that they have specific roles to play when they grow up to be men and women. Later then in life this affects the subjects we can study or the career we can choose .

In most societies, the role of man and woman are not valued equally. Men and women do not have the same status. Let us look at how this difference Let us look at how this difference exists in the work done by men and women.

- Make a drawing of a street or a park in your neighbourhood. Show the different kinds of activities young boys and girls may be engaged in. You could do this individually or in groups.
- Are there as many girls as boys in your drawing? Most probably you would have drawn fewer girls. Can you think of reasons .
- why there are fewer women and girls in your neighbourhood streets, parks and markets in the late evenings or at night?
- Are girls and boys doing different activities? Can you think of reasons why this might be so? What would happen if you replaced the girls with the boys and vice-versa?

Valuing house work

Across the world, the main responsibility for housework and care-giving tasks, like looking after the family, especially children, the elderly and sick members, lies with women. Yet, as we have seen, the work that women do within the home is not recognised as work. It is also assumed that this is something that comes naturally to women. It, therefore, does not have to be paid for. And society devalues this work.

Lives of domestic workers

Many homes, particularly in towns and cities, employ domestic workers. They do a lot of work – sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes and dishes, cooking, looking after young children or the elderly. Most domestic workers are women. Sometimes, even young boys or girls are employed to do this work. Wages are low, as domestic work does not have much value. A domestic worker's day can begin as early as five in the morning and end as late as twelve at night! Despite the hard work they do, their employers often do not show them much respect.

This is what a female domestic worker had to say about her experience of working in Delhi – “My first job was with a rich family that lived in a three-storeyed house. The landlady was very strange as she would shout to get any work done. My work was in the kitchen. There were two other girls who did the cleaning. Our day would begin at 5 o'clock. For breakfast we would get a cup of tea and two dry rotis. We could never get a third roti. In the evening, when I cooked the food, the two other girls would beg me to give them an extra roti. I would secretly give it to them and make an extra one for myself. We were so hungry after working through the day! We could not wear chappals in the house. I felt angry and humiliated. Did we not work all day? Did we not deserve to be treated with some respect?

In fact, what we commonly term as housework actually involves many different tasks. A number of these tasks require heavy physical work. In both rural and urban areas women and girls have to fetch water. In rural areas women and girls carry heavy headloads of firewood. Tasks like washing clothes, cleaning, sweeping and picking up loads require bending, lifting and carrying. Many chores, like cooking, involve standing for long hours in front of hot stoves. The work women do is strenuous and physically demanding — words that we normally associate with men.

1. Think, What will happen, if your mother or the people of your home who work go for a strike for one day.
2. Why do people think that generally boys or men cannot do household work?
3. According to you, whether they should work at home? If yes then Why and If no, then why not? Give reasons to support your answer.

Let us learn an example of Lakshmi who proved her identity with cooperation of her parents..

Generally we see that rail engine is driven by men. We see the stance was turned by Lakshmi Lakra, 27-year old a young tribal woman from Jharkhand, has become the first woman train driver with Northern Railway.

Laxmi's parents are not literate but they struggled and overcame many hardships to make sure their children got an education. Laxmi studied in a government school. Even in school, Laxmi.

helped with the house work and did odd jobs. She studied hard and did well and then went on to get a diploma in electronics. She then took the railway board exam and passed it on her first attempt.

Laxmi says, "I love challenges and the moment somebody says it is not for girls, I make sure I go ahead and do it." Laxmi has had to do this several times in her life – when she wanted to take electronics; when she rode motorcycles at the polytechnic; and when she decided to become an engine driver.

In the same way, there are many contributions of women of Chhattisgarh in different fields , such as-

Manisha Thakur , Assistant Police inspector ,she is working for women and girls education of Bastar. Pooja Agnihotri (Proffessor) Engineering college- Defence research and development organization (DRDO) , who was honoured by young scientist award , is presently leading an important role in the field of science. Leena Yadu , First women in Raipur as wrestler and coach who represented the international team. She is called as First Dangal girl of Chhattisgarh. Hina Yasmin Khan , District Prosecution officer, is doing her responsible job facing various problems after she lost her husband as martyr in naxalite attack. Mona Sen, Chhatisgarhi film actress, awarded by mini mata award, is brand ambassador for beti bachao, beti padhao. She has adopted orphan children and flourishing their life. Teejan Bai, Pandvani singer, after retiring from B.S.P (Bhilai steel plant) is teaching children skill of pandvani and also going in nation and abroad and making the country proud.



fig 7.1 Teejan Bai (Pandwani singer)

Women's work and equality

As we have seen the low value attached to women's household and care-giving work is not an individual or family matter. It is part of a larger system of inequality between men and women. It, therefore, has to be dealt with through actions not just at the level of the individual or the family but also by the government. As we now know, equality is an important principle of our Constitution. The Constitution says that being male or female should not become a reason for discrimination. In reality, inequality between the sexes exists. The government is, therefore, committed to understanding the reasons for this and taking positive steps to remedy the situation. For example, it recognizes that burden of child-

care and housework falls on women and girls. This naturally has an impact on whether girls can attend school. It determines whether women can work outside the house and what kind of jobs and careers they can have. The government has set up anganwadis or child-care centres in several villages in the country.

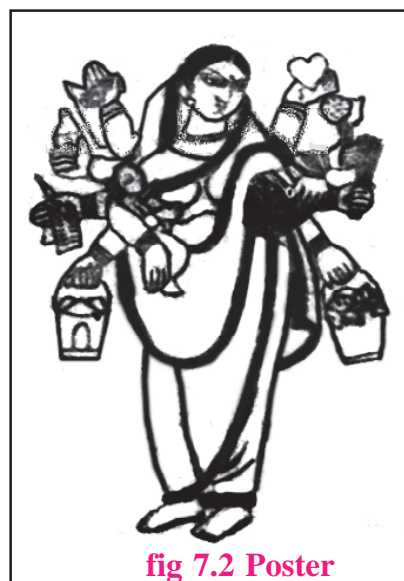


fig 7.2 Poster

This poster (in fig 7.2) was created by a women's group in Bengal. Can you write an interesting slogan for the poster?

Learning for change

Going to school is an extremely important part of your life. As more and more children enter school every year, we begin to think that it is normal for all children to go to school. Today, it is difficult for us to imagine

that school and learning could be seen as “out of bounds” or not appropriate for some children. But in the past, the skill of reading and writing was known to only a few. Most children learnt the work their families or elders did. For girls, the situation was worse. In communities that taught sons to read and write, daughters were not allowed to learn the alphabet. Even in families where skills like pottery, weaving and craft were taught, the contribution of daughters and women was only seen as supportive. For example, in the pottery trade, women collected the mud and prepared the earth for the pots. But since they did not operate the wheel, they were not seen as potters. But there was a lot of opposition to educating girls even then. Yet many women and men made efforts to open schools for girls. Women struggled to learn to read and write.

Women's movement

Women and girls now have the right to study and go to school. There are other spheres – like legal reform, violence and health – where the situation of women and girls has improved. These changes have not happened automatically. Women individually, and collectively have struggled to bring about these changes. This struggle is known as the Women's Movement. Individual women and women's organisations from different parts of the country are part of the movement. Many men support the women's movement as well.

The diversity, passion and efforts of those involved makes it a very vibrant movement. Different strategies have been used to spread awareness, fight discrimination and seek justice. Here are some glimpses of this struggle.

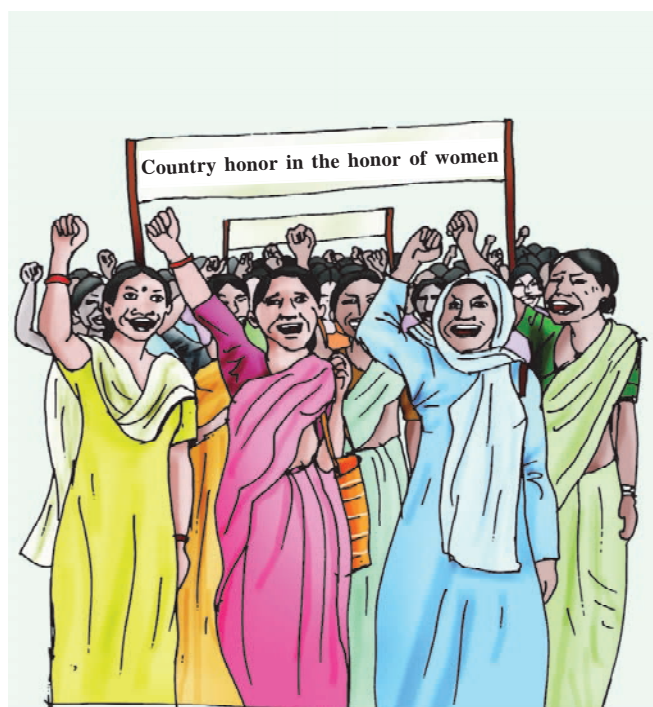


fig 7.3 Equality and work of women

Campaigning

Campaigns to fight discrimination and violence against women are an important part of the women's movement. Campaigns have also led to new laws being passed. A law was passed in 2006 to give women who face physical and mental violence within their homes, also called domestic violence, some legal protection. Similarly, efforts made by the women's movement led the Supreme Court to formulate guidelines in 1997 to protect women against sexual harassment at the workplace and within educational institutions. And gave instructions to formulate vishaka committee for protection of women. Law against dowry, toll free number 1090/1091/01123219750 (Central Government) for girls safety was made available.

Raising Awareness

An important part of the women's movements' work is to raise public awareness on women's rights issues. Their message has been spread through street plays, songs and public meetings.

Protesting

The women's movement raises its voice when violations against women take place or for example, when a law or policy acts against their interests. Public rallies and demonstrations are a very powerful way of drawing attention to injustices.

EXERCISES

- I. Are the statements given alongside true or false. Support your answer with the use of an example :
 - a. All societies do not think similarly about the roles that boys and girls play.
 - b. Our society does not make distinctions between boys and girls when they are growing up.
 - c. Women who stay at home do not work.
 - d. The work that women do is less valued than that of men.
- II. Make a list of toys and games that boys typically play and another for girls. If there is a difference between the two lists, can you think of some reasons why this is so? Does this have any relationship to the roles children have to play as adults?
- III. If you have someone working as a domestic help in your house or locality talk to her and find out a little bit more about her life – Who are her family members? Where is her home? How many hours does she work? How much does she get paid? Write a small story based on these details.

Activities

1. With the help of teacher, Make a list of Indian women in the fields given below .
 - (a) Famous Scientist. (b) Famous social worker (c) Famous Dancer
 - (d) famous Singer (e) Famous sports person.
2. With the help of your teacher write the name of women in India holding the post given below.
 - (a) Chief Minister (b) Governor (c) Prime minister
 - (d) Chief Justice of Supreme court (e) President of lok Sabha
3. Make list of women of your area working at important post.
4. Collect the information with the help of your teacher about the programmes runn by government for women upliftment.

