

ROLE OF WOMEN IN CHANGING IN THE WORLD

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CHAPTER

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Introduction

➤ INTRODUCTION

Women were not secure neither were they treated properly since the prehistoric time. History proves that women were called weaker sex and were not given any role or responsibility in the society. Women had to fight at every step for their rights. They had been struggling for equality for many years.

Women are typically associated with the home and generally called homemakers. Even in the professional ground woman had to choose a safe job, so they became teachers and nurses. Certain jobs like being a scientist or a technical oriented person the women were not preferred, first because of the risk involved secondly the mind set that woman cannot handle such jobs. This mindset led to the differences among men and women and men were chosen for professional education as doctor, engineer, pilot and scientist. Girls are not encouraged to take up such job after their education. They are made to get marry.

However, there is a lot of women who have came out of the box and have taken up challenging jobs.

Learning for change

- (i) 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.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) 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.
- (iv) 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.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) You have probably noticed in the above table that SC and ST girls leave school at a rate that is higher than the category 'all girls'. This means that girls who are from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds are less likely to remain in school. The 2001 census also found that Muslim girls are less likely, than Dalit and Adivasi girls, to complete primary school. While a Muslim girl is likely to stay in school for around three years, girls from other communities spend around four years in school.
- (vii) In the nineteenth century, many new ideas about education and learning emerged. Schools became more common and communities that had never learnt reading and writing started sending their children to school.
- (viii) 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

School level	All boys	SC boys	ST boys	All Girls	SC girls	ST girls	Total
Primary (Class -1-5)	34	37	49	29	36	49	31
Elementary (Class 6-8)	52	57	69	53	62	71	52
Secondary (Class 9-10)	61	71	78	65	76	81	63

Schooling and Education today

- (i) Today, both boys and girls attend school in large numbers. Yet, as we will see, there still remain differences between the education of boys and girls. India has a census every 10 years which counts the whole population of the country. It also gathers detailed information about the people living in India – their age, schooling, what work they do, and so on.
- (ii) We use this information to measure many things, like the number of literate people, and the ratio of men and women.

- (iii) According to the 1961 census, about 40 per cent of all boys and men (7 years old and above) were literate (that is, they could at least write their names) compared to just 15 per cent of all girls and women. In the most recent census of 2001, these figures have grown to 76 per cent for boys and men, and 54 per cent for girls and women.
- (iv) This means that the proportion of both men and women who are now able to read and have at least some amount of schooling has increased. But, as you can also see, the percentage of the male group is still higher than the female group. The gap has not gone away.
- (v) There are several reasons why children from Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim communities leave school. In many parts of the country, especially in rural and poor areas, there may not even be proper schools nor teachers who teach on a regular basis. If a school is not close to people's homes, and there is no transport like buses or vans, parents may not be willing to send their girls to school.
- (vi) Many families are too poor and unable to bear the cost of educating all their children. Boys are given preference in this situation.

Women's Movement

- (i) 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.
- (ii) This struggle is known as the Women's movement. Individual women and women's organizations 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 make it a very vibrant movement.
- (iii) Different strategies have been used to spread awareness, fight discrimination and seek justice. Here are some glimpses of this struggle.
- (iv) 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. In the 1980s, for example, women's groups across the country spoke out against dowry death, cases of young brides being murdered by their in-laws or husbands, greedy for more dowry. Women's groups spoke out against the failure to bring these cases to justice. They did so by coming on to the streets, approaching the courts, and by sharing information. Eventually, this became a public issue in the newspapers and society, and the dowry laws were changed to punish families who seek dowry.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) 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.
- (vii) The women's movement is also about showing solidarity with other women's causes.