

Women's Empowerment

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 The Importance of Women and Components of Empowerment

3.3.1 Misogyny

3.3.2 Social Attitudes

3.3.3 Components of Empowerment

3.4 Violence against Women

3.4.1 Female Foeticide & Infanticide

3.4.2 Forced marriage

3.4.3 Domestic violence

3.4.4 Denial of educations

3.4.5 Cast barriers

3.4.6 Forced to prostitution

3.5 Women's Legal Rights in India

3.5.1 Disregard for Laws that Protect Women's Rights

3.5.2 Conflict between Religion and Secular Law

3.5.3 Laws that enhance Women's Visibility

3.5.4 Laws against Sexual harassment

3.6 Women's economic and political power

3.7 Intext Questions

3.8 Summery

3.9 Unit Assignment

3.10 Glossary

Introduction

'I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. I am of the opinion that she shall labor under no legal difficulties which are not suffered by men. So long as women in India do not take equal part with men in the affairs of the world and in religious and political matters we shall not see India's star rising'

-Mahatma Gandhiji

'Why are girls better achievers? Girls finish things. Boys tend to be more erratic and are weaker in approaching learning systematically.'

-Shahanna Ahmed, Teacher, Lahore

A woman has the right to happiness, the right to know, the right to make choices that affect her life, and the right to have her opinion respected regarding her own body, and her place in the family and in society. A woman has a right to respect within her family, the community and society. An empowered woman is free from enslavement, free from mental, physical or moral abuse from her family, social group or nation, and she enjoys the right to develop herself to her full choice. Moral abuse is to subject a woman to remarks that accuse and shame her for moral profligacy if she does not conform to the dictates of the patriarchy or does not show respect to her husband or in-laws in ways that they demand. She may be accused of taking a lover without any sign or evidence of this being the case.

It is necessary to confront age old patriarchal social attitudes that consider a woman to be less important than a man. She has been deprived of basic human, social and political rights for many centuries. Society can no longer justify these attitudes and their practices and behaviours. Our civilization has suffered and become damaged as a result of this lack of understanding.

This program on values and spirituality seeks to establish that empowered women are essential to bring balance and harmony into the world. Women need to claim their rightful position of equality and complementarily with men in order to restore equilibrium in society. Social development is obstructed by archaic patriarchal social attitudes. People who hold them need to recognize the legally defined rights of women in Indian society. The attainment of women's rights is an effort for human rights.

3.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

1. Describe the importance of women and name women's legal rights
2. Enumerate the components of empowerment
3. Identify the obstacles to women's empowerment
4. Detail the different forms of violence against women

3.3 The Importance of Women & Components of Empowerment

A Woman is as important as a man. From ancient times to the present, women's labor and efforts, often unnoticed and always uncalculated, have contributed substantially to the well-being of society. A woman is called the first guru of a child. A child is nurtured physically, emotionally and spiritually by the mother. Therefore the mother is the key to the quality of the next generation. If the mother is aware of her value, if she is valued and respected by the family and society, if she enjoys her rights and privileges as a mother, wife and daughter, then these elements are transmitted to both her daughters and her sons.

If the wife is aware of being an equal partner with equal partner with equal rights to the wealth and status of her husband, she can contribute her wisdom, her aesthetic sense, her live and her spiritual beauty to the marriage and enhance the quality of life of the extended family. If the girl child is received at birth with the happiness and love that is the fundamental right of a newborn, she is a light and a source of joy and contentment in her parents' home. If she enjoys the level of education that hones her intellect to its optimum potential she can shine in all the social roles she plays. If a widow enjoys the undiminished prestige, love and support of her family and community, she can retain a sense of dignity to the end of her days and serve through the wisdom of her experience.

3.3.1 Misogyny

Misogyny (hatred of women) can be traced back to the scriptures of all the religions. There is no word for hatred of men. Where something does not exist there can be no word for it. Subtle spiritual truths described by mystics in metaphorical language are subject to distortion when interpreted by the uninitiated. Often the distortions become crystallized into religious beliefs and attitudes within societies. For example, the soul is described as the bride of the Supreme Being, and as such is fortunate (suhagin). This became interpreted as a women being fortunate only when married to a man. The scriptures speak of the pure soul as fair and the impure soul as dark. This was taken to mean that lighter-skinned women are better than darker-skinned ones. The scriptures speak of the soul dedicating itself totally and unconditionally to the Supreme, and consequently a woman is expected to dedicate herself to her husband unquestioningly, regardless of his behavior.

Males are called 'purusha' (beings) and females are called 'prakruti' (things). Males are taught to assume a dominant position and women to assume a position of subservience. When subtle spiritual truths are interpreted in a materialistic way, the original spiritual meaning disappears and the materialist interpretations are adopted.

Physical force then subjugates the spiritual; external moral authorities impose their opinions; sensual appetites devour resources and a culture of balance and harmony is overturned and transformed into one of 'haves' and 'have nots', victims and perpetrators. In such a world women are viewed as objects to be used for sensual pleasure and the service of their masculine owners and masters. The virgin woman is worshipped as pure then married off where she is valued only through any sons she bears. She is rejected as inauspicious if she outlives her husband.

3.3.2 Social Attitudes

A centuries' old belief is that women are biologically weak and therefore cannot take up certain responsibilities. Although the Constitution of India gave equal rights to men and women, specifically prohibiting any gender-based discrimination and stating that certain special privileges must be given to women, equal rights have never been achieved in practice. Gender biases operate in every social institution from the family to the court system, the education system, local and state government agencies, etc. They exist at every layer of society and in almost every home.

The False Assumption

The widely prevalent attitude is that a female is inherently inferior to a male. She is a liability, who consumes family resources. Mental violence is directed against girls from within the family from a very tender age by denying them access to nutritious food, health care and education. Most people are unaware that 30% of households in India are headed by females, which means that 30% of Indians households are maintained exclusively on the earnings of women. In spite of evidence to the contrary, people still believe that women are mere 'users' and not 'producer' or 'workers'. Money that is given to their wives by working men is not used by the women for themselves but is used to benefit the family. Studies also show that women who earn money to augment the family's earnings use their resources almost entirely for the family.

Female literacy rate in India are very low. Most women have no opportunity for skill acquisition, and generally have to work as unskilled labor. They discharge domestic responsibilities at the same time as doing remunerative work. They are victims of what is referred to as double drudgery. Domestic work done by women is without security, without financial compensation, without leave, and without leave, and without the benefits enjoyed by the patriarchal society, studies have shown that if we had to pay for all the work that women do at home, it would cost the government a great deal of money. The following story illustrates the assumptions many men have about women and their domestic work.

There was a man who had been relentlessly scolding his wife, saying that she sat around the house all day doing nothing, she was worthless, and should be ashamed of herself for being so lazy and good for nothing. One day she decided to do nothing all day and just sit around being lazy. On his return from the office in the evening, he found the dinner had not been prepared, the house was not swept or washed. The dirty clothes remained scattered on the floor. The child had not been bathed. The breakfast dishes had not been cleaned. The house was total chaos. He roared with indignation and anger, threatening her with various punishments. She then quietly pointed out that he had been accusing her for months of doing nothing all day and just lazing around. She wanted to show him that in fact she is normally very busy occupied in maintaining order and cleanliness in the home, caring for the child and preparing meals in time for his daily return from work. In future he should realize that these things do not occur spontaneously, and that she is doing them regularly and with responsibility.

Most men assume that women are happy doing what they do, and take it for granted that the mothers and grandmothers have no interest in doing anything other than what is socially prescribed for them: Patriarchy encourages women to feel inferior for not doing economically remunerative work. Especially in rural situations, due to lack of education and being confined to the home, women have very

few opportunities articulate their feelings about their condition. Once men recognize and value the work done by women, they may see that their own success would not be possible without the contribution of women. This is reflected in the phrase; 'Behind every successful man, there lies an exhausted woman' Society needs to recognize and value the invisible and unpaid contribution of women.

Archaic social attitudes perpetuate the myth of the innate moral superiority of men over women, of light-skinned people over dark-skinned people, of elders over younger people, of the wealthy over the poor. These notions are also sustained by folklore, mythology and well-known aphorisms. For example, this view is supported in India by reference to the myth that the Mahabharata war occurred because of Draupadi's insulting words to Duryodhan. These attitudes are more common and more extreme in villages, tribal communities and among the urban poor. However, they exist to a greater or lesser extent throughout most of the strata of Indian society. Among the urban middle class educated people there is somewhat more respect for women.

3.3.3 The Components of Empowerment

You cannot get power by asking, demanding or complaining. You get power by claiming it. First you need to make yourself powerful. Women in general have been weakened emotionally and intellectually by the relentless challenges of a 'patriarchal, misogynistic and materialistic culture. Women in general have been corrupted by materialism, vanity, loss of self-respect, dependence and subservience. Women (and men) have to heal their spiritual and psychological wounds, cultivate their intellectual and professional abilities, and take power from the Divine through meditation, spiritual study and practice.

Self-Esteem

An empowered woman is proud of herself. She feels good about the fact that she is a woman. The prevailing cultural attitude, which many women absorb, is to feel ashamed and socialized to believe that she is not physically, emotionally or intellectually capable of doing many things that men can do. One of the slogans of the women's movement is, 'My biology is not my destiny.' While it is true that certain biological functions are performed only by women, in other human activities gender is not an issue. A woman need not feel sorry that she is a woman, or try to be like a man. In our society, if someone wishes to compliment a woman they often use a male reference point and say, 'You are different, you are just like a man.' Such negative compliments need to be challenged.

Awareness

An empowered woman is aware and educated about her rights. This presupposes inner sensitivity and intellectual examination of her intuitive feelings, which she begins to articulate. She seeks out information, recognizes the value of discussion about relevant issues and follows matters up. When a woman knows and understands her rights and she is aware of her rights first as a person, and then as a woman, she can take further steps. Awareness becomes a power when a person translates it into action.

Power of Choice

An empowered woman is free to make informed decisions and exercise her rights. This is the power of choice. Choice means a woman has control over her life and the freedom to make informed decisions relating to her body, as well as to all other aspects of her life. It does not mean that a woman has to do certain things to be labeled empowered. An empowered woman knows which choices she wishes to make and is free to exercise them. She does not do things only to please others. If a woman wants to stay at home, or work outside, or remain single she should be free to make those choices. An empowered woman is conscious of the gender inequalities in society. At every stage she resists them. She does not take for granted the way women are spoken about. An empowered woman is always is always conscious of gender biases hidden within language, attitudes and practices.

She identifies them and responds immediately and intelligently, that is, she demonstrates her ability to make choices based on understanding. Gender biases are deeply ingrained in all aspects of our society. Someone who is unaware will not notice them. An empowered woman does not compromise or accept that gender bias is so widespread that she can do nothing about by an individual within one institution is cumulative and ultimately creates change on a wide scale.

A few women in India have broken the barriers that constrained them, identified, their goals and reached the targets they set for themselves. Empowered women have usually had social, economic and educational advantages. The vision of women's liberation is realized when empowerment takes place on a large scale across all sections of society.

Micro Level Change

The most effective approach to change develops at the micro level. This means that an individual does influence situations and can precipitate change but the person needs to be determined and undeterred by resistance. It is a form of leadership undertaken by resistance. It is a form of leadership undertaken by individuals who present a clear and powerful vision of what is needed and how to accomplish it. This type of change is easy for others to follow as they have an example. The macro approach means to attempt to bring change through legislation and impose new attitudes and behaviors from above. The macro approach has been tried for a very long time but it has succeeded only in perpetuating inequalities.

An empowered woman can bring change through the micro level approach. She first of all looks at herself. She has daily contact with many people and may enjoy wide social contacts and have many who listen to her. She communicates these ideas through her life and provides alternative perspectives to those around her. If someone does not appreciate or accept the alternative viewpoint, it is not a reason to give it up.

It is very important to continue to resist all forms of bias against women and against people. Our society has made women invisible, and the time has now come for women to become visible. An empowered woman will be conscious of forms of discrimination and continue to resist them.

Empowerment Begins Outside

In the initial stages, the women's movement was confined to small discussion groups among educated and informed women who raised questions about women's oppression. Subsequently, these women felt it should become a mass movement with a mass base. Meeting together, raising questions and seeking answers are all important in the struggle for gender justice. Generally speaking, resistance to oppression is started by people who are not themselves oppressed. Exposure to issues of empowerment makes both women and men aware of the realities and describes how society would be if oppressive practices were discontinued and men and women started living and thinking as equals. The problem of dependence on outside leadership faces every movement, because leaders are often reluctant to withdraw from their positions of power. The success of a movement ultimately depends on creating leaders from within.

3.4 Violence against women

Institutionalized subordination, exploitation and brutalization of women remain ingrained in Indian society.'

Annika Sorenstam, Swedish woman golfer

Domestic violence is common in India and cuts across barriers of class, caste and religion. Women in India face discrimination at every stage of life. In the first stage, a female foetus is often aborted and the furl child is not allowed to see the light of day. The second is female infanticide immediately after birth.

3.4.1 Female Foeticide and Infanticide

In the 1940s the Census of District Officers in British India recorded female infanticide in their official duty records. It is paradoxical that in a country where the Constitution gives equality to women. Thousands of girl children are denied the right to be born. Over the last ten years in different regions of the country, the number of foeticides has increased drastically. The gender ration in India at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was 972 females per 1000 males. In the 1991 census it had declined to 929. The figures for the 2001 census show only a slight increase to 931 females per 1000 males. The prenatal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and prevention of Misuse) Act was introduced in 1991 and finally passed in 1994, but gender determination tests continue to be used to determine whether the foetus is female and whether to terminate the pregnancy.

How do people justify female foeticide or infanticide? They believe that if girls are allowed to be born, or allowed to grow up, they will have to be married and heavy amounts will have to be paid as

dowry. In many sections of society the family continues to incur expenses for the daughter's personal needs after her marriage, including meeting childbirth expenses. Although it is illegal, the demand for dowry may also continue after the marriage. Many people argue that it is better to get rid of the girl foetus or infant than allow her to grow up and cause pain for the family later. Before the women's groups protested, local trains in Mumbai used to display advertisements for abortion clinics which read, Spend Rs 600 now or Rs 60,000 later. Clinics offered walk-in gender determination tests and facilities for aborting female foetuses. Mobile clinics in some parts of India offer not only facilities for gender determination, but also gender-selective abortions.

3.4.2 Forced Marriage at a Very Young Age

Both the Constitution of India and the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1978, prescribed the minimum age in India, however, the picture varies from the region. If a girl child is forcibly married at the age of 11, 14, 15 or 16, this is violence. Young girls are married at a relatively early age in many rural areas and get caught in a relentless circle of marriage, motherhood, childcare and domestic drudgery. It is very difficult for these women to seek emancipation.

An Empowered woman has the freedom to make choices. A woman has the right to make her own choices, whether to pursue education and/or choose a partner in marriage. At present many girls are withdrawn from school or college and married by force to a person chosen by their parents. Somebody else decides when she should have her first child, how many children she should have, whether she should get married and to whom, when she should have her first child, how many children she should have, whether she should abort a female foetus, or whether she should kill a female child. Her rights exist in theory, but in practice she has no control over her body or her life.

3.4.3 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a worldwide phenomenon. Surveys by the International center for research on women estimate that 60% of women face violence at some point in their marriage (Times of India, 17 Dec 2004). Double standards operate. People say that a woman is regarded with great respect and is very revered but the stark reality is that countless sometimes until the end of a women's life. Family violence is one of the most oppressive blocks to women's emancipation because it is so frequently hidden and denied.

Women are afraid to speak out about their suffering fearing the social shame it would bring to herself and her family, poverty economic and social insecurity for women, and the disappearance of sources of livelihood. The National Crime Bureau of India noted an increase in reported violence against women – from 82,818 cases in 1994 to 113,000 in 1998 with 13,910 registered cases of rape. Between 1987 and 1993 in Orissa there was a 305% increase in dowry deaths, and a 55% increase in rape cases. Just 12% of those charged were convicted. Karnataka, a medium development indicator state, has the highest rate of dowry deaths in the country. (Karnataka is a state where development is neither high nor low in comparison with other states in India.) Female foeticide, dowry deaths in the country (Karnataka is a state where development is neither high nor low in comparison with other states in India.) Female foeticide, dowry deaths, rape, caste violence, and maternal mortality are only a few of the overt forms

of violence faced by women. Low social status, early marriage, too many children too closely spaced are still, the realities faced by many rural poor women.

When a woman is killed for dowry, it is not only her right as a woman that is trampled, but her right to life itself. Indian Government statistics for 1999-2001 show that a total of 6,347 Indian women were killed by fire.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, prohibits the giving or taking of dowry. Giving and taking of dowry is punishable by five years' imprisonment and Rs 15,000 or the value of the dowry, whichever is more. Demand for dowry is punishable by a minimum of 6 months to 2 years imprisonment, and a fine of up to 10,000. Wherever dowry has already been given it must be returned to the woman within three months of the date of the marriage. People are unaware that laws exist to protect victims of domestic violence. Many women do not know that they can go to a police station or a law court to seek protection. Unfortunately, if a woman is being beaten and she does seek protection. Unfortunately, if a woman is being beaten and she does seek protection, she is often confronted by hostile law enforcing authorities. This is because the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 states that the institution of marriage does not fall under secular law. The Government recognizes Hindu law and supports its religious canon that states that the marriage must be preserved at any cost. That cost may include the woman's health, sanity and life.

Law enforcing agencies usually apply the law by telling her to endure and adjust to situations of domestic violence. This canon takes precedence over other secular laws that protect women, such as laws against dowry, domestic violence, property rights, etc. Many women want to get out of oppressive situations at home, but there are few secure shelters for battered women. Women who continue silently to endure such treatment are considered long-suffering and good role models.

3.4.4 Denial of Education

Patriarchy, whether enforced by men or women, denies knowledge to women in order to sustain its influence. It discourages them from questioning their roles, and prevents them from having control over their own lives. Violence in the form of physical brutality targets the woman's body through beating and harassment. Denial of rights to education and other necessities are also manifestations of violence. If you remove a girl from school you haven't beaten her, but you have deprived her of her rights.

Our patriarchal society frequently denies education and information to girls. Either they are never enrolled in school or they are withdrawn very easily. In rural areas, families are heavily dependent on the labor of the girl child. Increasing poverty has made it essential for parents to work as laborers, and the girl children back home are saddled with the responsibilities of cooking, looking after younger children, collection of fuel and fodder, and carrying food to their parents at work. Today nearly half the female population in India remains illiterate despite greater numbers of females having attended school. Government investment in education for girls is lower. The census for 2001 shows 296 million people in India are illiterate, although this figure has lowered since 1991 when the illiteracy figure was 328 million. When girls do get educational opportunities, they excel. Since 2000 girls have consistently been out-performing boys. The Higher Secondary 12th standard results for India for 2004 reveal that 82.28%

girls passed compared with 71.29% boys. In no place did the boys score better than the girls. This pattern can also be found in the UK.

The Six Educational Zones of India	Girls	Boys
Chennai	91.72%	89.54%
Delhi	81.22%	68.75%
Chandigarh	83.66%	77.12%
Ajmer	83.31%	77.12%
Allahabad	78.92%	65.48%
Guwahati	65.46%	60.87%

3.4.5 Abuse of women by other women

Women often treat with contempt other women lower than themselves in the traditional family hierarchy. A woman who has been exploited in the family often oppresses the younger women. Most women are unconscious of doing it, or they justify it. The gender question is closely related to the question is closely related to the question of power distribution and power sharing. In many families women's spaces are defined. When the son gets married and his wife comes into the home, the women already there may see her as a threat. The insecurity a daughter-in-law often feels in her in-laws home increases when other daughters-in-law arrive who may seem more beautiful, self-confident, intelligent or competent. Her insecurity is expressed in hostile behaviors, which are often mistaken for jealousy and punished. When women have broader spaces, which are also outside the home, perhaps this behavior will stop. It is also important for men to protest at any inappropriate or unlawful behavior towards their wives, sisters-in-law or daughters-in-law. Men cannot absolve themselves of their responsibility to intervene in misunderstanding between women in the family on the grounds that, 'It is a women's issue.'

Women are socialized to reflect a man at twice his natural size (to paraphrase Nirginia Woolf). Women are also socialized to compete with each other for the attentions of men whilst denying their competitiveness. Their reference point for, identity is a male. If a woman gives birth to a male child she is showered with praise, compliments and reverence. A woman who dies before her husband is worshipped as a goddess. Cruel social attitudes against women area a absorbed by women in politics have altered the position of other women in society. A woman who attains political power often agrees to be party to decisions which go against the interests of other women in society in order to keep that power.

3.4.6 Women and Caste Barriers

Women are exploited in every group of the rigidly divided Indian society. The barrier of caste difference prevents women joining hands to fight for any cause. Consciousness of the caste group one belongs to predominates over feelings of responsibility about issues of social concern. The women's movement in India is criticized for being managed by urban, educated women who mostly belong to castes in the upper strata of society. A major issue facing the Indian women's movement today is the question of 'insiders' versus outsiders. The world Dalit means oppressed. A Dalit woman from the scheduled caste faces two forms of exploitation the first as a dalit and the second as a woman, both

within that group and from outside that group. These divisions hinder unified resistance to social oppression.

3.4.7 Forced to prostitution

Sexual abuse of girl children is one of the most harrowing truths of our times and is common in all parts of the country. Sex tourism in India is on the increase. Young girls are being sold for exploitation in the flesh trade and no one knows what happens to them later. They may contract AIDS. They may be abandoned or enter into brothels. If they are lucky they may be rescued by the state, but even after they are rescued, they can rarely be sent back home because their community would not accept them. The parents are usually kept totally ignorant of what has happened.

Example:

A few years ago about 20 girls were rescued from a Mumbai brothel and returned to Mysore. They were all from surrounding villages and most came from very poor families. Their ages ranged from 14 to 20 years. The police came to know about their situation when one of the girls, unable to bear the torture any further, jumped from the roof and ran with a broken keg to the police. The Mumbai police informed their counterparts in Mysore who brought the girls back. There was no provision for keeping them in the police station, but the Inspector was humane and sensitive. He contacted a women's organization and many of the traders in Mysore were persuaded to give clothes and food to these girls. One of them had contracted AIDS. The most tragic case was that of a dumb, illiterate girl who remained in the shelter home because she could not give details of her family. Some refused to return to their families. A few received vocational training and later found jobs.

3.5 Women's Legal Rights in India

The Preamble to the Constitution ensures, inter alia, justice, equality of status and opportunity and dignity of the individual. The Fundamental Rights guarantee women's equality under the law. Articles 14 and 15 pronounce not only the rights of men and women to equality under the law but prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender by the state. Article 15 goes as far as to forbid the state to subject any citizen to any disability on the basis of gender in access to, or use of public places or services. Article 16 states equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment under the state. The Directive Principles of State Policy include adequate means of livelihood for men and women, equal work, protection of health and strength of workers, protection of men and women from abuse, just and humane conditions and maternity relief.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment calling for 33% representation by women provoked visceral reactions in parliament from male members of parliament. Within the political parties barely 3.3% of candidates are women. Women in local area planning have engaged in heated debates on financial allocation, accountability, planning measures and yet they have been denied presence in Parliament. Women's rights. Denial of rights occurs in families where people are motivated by selfishness and greed. A demand for dowry, harassment of a daughter-in-law, with drawing a girl from school or an upper caste

make exploiting a Dalit woman, all indicate selfishness and the treatment of human beings as objects. These inhuman and cruel social attitudes are absorbed by women as much as by men.

3.5.1 Disregard for Laws

Legal emancipation does not result in social emancipation. The laws in India are superstructure built upon a foundation which is gender biased and ridden with prejudices. The history of the reform movement is only a few decades old, whereas exploitation has a history of thousands of years. The hurdles preventing women from enjoying the benefit and protection of laws the secure their rights need to be removed.

Only a minority of women in this country, including women with a formal education, are aware of their rights. Many women are unaware of their rights over their bodies. If a woman desires a family planning operation, even today many hospitals and doctors will proceed only with the written consent of the husband. This a great curb on women. The woman gives birth to a child, takes responsibility for bringing up the child, yet she has no right to decide whether she can undergo further pregnancies. The husband decides what is to be done to the wife. The laws would have some meaning if women were informed and educated about their rights and there by developed confidence in applying them.

3.5.2 Conflict between Religion and Law

According to Hindu law, marriage is a holy sanskar and not a contract unlike in Muslim law. Hindu law states 'conjunctis partitent perinaeest denature' which means that to keep husband and wife together is the law of nature and 'viret uxor consenture in lege una persona' means that husband and wife are considered one in law. Although Hindu law states that there should be only one wife, the first wife is expected to endure the situation of multiple wives without complaint. This attitude is contained within the word 'adjust'. Regardless of how illegal a situation may be, the woman is invariably told to adjust to it and she is discouraged from seeking any redress. The courts consider that preserving the marriage is more important than sustaining the individual's rights and penalises the first wife by obliging her to accept the mistress or second wife into the household rather than penalizing the man for his breach of the laws. Suggestions and advice to women often include, 'After all, you are a woman so you should just take it'. The problem is invariably bigamy.

The Family Court system was set up in India in 1986 for speedy dispensation of cases of divorce, maintenance, alimony, inheritance etc. The Family Court however, appears to have a hidden agenda to preserve the institution of marriage at any cost, following the letter of the religious law at the cost of a woman's human rights. This agenda becomes visible when viewed from a woman's perspective.

Example 1:

There was case of a man who died without leaving a will. He had not registered his marriage so there was no proof of his wife's married status. His two sons of the marriage conspired to prevent his surviving wife, their mother, from getting any money by claiming that they did not know her.

Example 2:

A mother goes to a bank or a public office to ask for a certificate for her child. The general trend is to require the father's identity, unless she fights for her right to sign. The typical response is for the official

to wear a sad face and say, 'I'm sorry, does this child not have a father?' They pretend that the rule requires the father's signature, unless the woman demands to see that rule n writing.

3.5.3 Laws that Enhance Women's Visibility

The Supreme Court of India declared recently that the mother is also the natural guardian of her children. This declaration took a long time to arrive. A mother gives birth to a child and gives her time for many years to the child's upbringing. Practice a woman can only receive the advantages accorded to her by the law if she fights for her rights. This means she first has to be aware of her rights.

The Karnataka Government has made it compulsory to give the mother's name on all school application forms. Social attitudes often make the identity of the mother invisible in documentation. The women's movement has been bringing pressure on the state to enact gender 'just laws and give effect to policies that recognize women's existence.

3.5.4 Laws Against Sexual Harassment

Stringent legislation has been passed against sexual harassment in India. The definition of sexual harassment has been widened to include verbal abuse. To protect women from sexual harassment every university has to have a committee set up on campus and given wide publicity so that people are aware that there is a body to which they can take complaints. And action will be taken. However, most women don't make use of it because many are afraid of the social stigma that is generally attached to a woman who has been violated or they are afraid of being penalized in other ways. Many are not confident that they will be taken seriously or that their grievances will be taken seriously or that their grievances will be redressed. If a woman does want to make use of it, she must be informed, decisive and understand that consequences.

Although laws exist for women to claim their rights, that fact of their doing so would reduce men's power. Consequently a common patriarchal reaction to women's fight for identity and emancipation is to trivialize the issues.

Example 1:

The following sign was displayed at a business: 'No matter how happily married you are, there is always the thought of adultery.'

This is in fact an insult to both men and women. It is an indication that social attitudes condone the emotional abuse of women. It illustrates society's double standard of morality, which applies one set of rules to women and another to men. A woman, who smokes for example, is considered immoral but when a man smokes, he is demonstrating masculinity. Medical science has clearly established that smoking is bad for health, which means it, is equally damaging for both men and women.

Example 2:

A woman doctor had evidence that her engineer husband had taken a second wife. She wanted to teach him a lesson, but she decided not to follow her idea through the courts when she realized that he would be suspended from his job if she launched a complaint through the legal system. Such unwillingness to take a proactive stance to claim her marital rights reflects the fact that the law does not provide sufficient support to take this step and that society is likely to ostracize her for doing so. Many women are caught in similar dilemmas and live their lives in fear.

3.8 Women's Economic and Political Power

After nearly 60 years of Independence and despite advancements in various fields, India stands today with a dismal record in several social development sectors. Of the 1.3 billion people who live in extreme poverty, the majority are women and girls. Some believe this estimate to be around 70% of the female population. Recent estimates of poverty of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe and female headed households show that caste and poverty status seem to go hand in hand. Virtually one third of the world's child laborers live in India. If you consider the female labor force, then Indian women contribute a much larger share of their earnings than men to basic family maintenance in the 60 million Indian households that are still below the poverty line. Women form the largest body of unskilled workers, being 90% of rural and 70% of urban unskilled workers.

Lack of health facilities in rural areas has made the maternal mortality rate of rural women aged between 15 and 45 particularly high at 12.5%. India's morbidity and mortality rate is 50 times that of developed countries. The Indian Council for Medical Research records show that age specification death rates reveal that up to the age of 35 more women than men die at every age level. The deaths of young girls exceed those of boys by almost one third of a million every year. 60% of the 50 million urban poor constitute women and children. On all the counts of income, education, mortality, morbidity, health, violence, political participation, access to water, sanitation and electricity it appears that women have had to shoulder extraordinary burdens of both inequitable development strategies and skewed sets of power relations.

Welfare

Women's issues are now being analyzed by planners through the paradigm of empowerment. The welfare approach which considered women as targets and beneficiaries was replaced by the development approach which raised questions about access to resources, yet disregarded the fundamental issue of unequal gender relations. Welfare was the first approach used in women's development programs but by the 1980s it became clear that the idea of welfare perpetuated gender biases. The welfare approach perceived a woman as someone in need of sympathy rather than identity. Offering a tailoring class or some money to start catering classes, or to prepare and sell pickles was not a solution to social inequalities. This paternalistic attitude only perpetuated age-old gender biases. Planners were willing to offer women some special concessions and privileges, but women's needs or perspectives were not adequately taken into account in any of these welfare programs.

Development

By the 1980s the concept of welfare was being severely questioned by the women's movement and feminists. Subsequently, the concept of development began to emerge. It was expected initially that

development would bring change for the better and improve the conditions of everyone on society, not just women.

Although some anti-poverty programs and employment generation schemes came into being, soon the question: 'Does development mean the same thing for men as for women?' and the meaning of 'women in development' began to assume importance. The assumption was that development in general meant that both men and women would be benefitted equally, but that did not occur. Women are always constrained by the patriarchal practices and prevailing value systems which favor men. Therefore it was men who generally made the first use of any benefits offered by the development programs. Some development programs completely ignored the special needs and priorities of women.

For example, a program was implemented in primary schools to bridge the gap between the school and the community. The planners decided that parents, Teachers and children would all spend a day together. During the course of the interaction, it became clear that while conditions in rural areas were acceptable for male teachers, women required the basic facilities of a toilet and some privacy for bathing in order to consider taking up a post as a teacher in rural schools. However the all male planners disregarded the fact that a woman will not expose herself in public in matters of personal hygiene. Instead they claimed that women were unwilling and uninterested in working in rural areas. Such a generalization is an insult to a woman's intelligence, her willingness to work as an educator where there is a demand, and a denial of her fundamental right to basic privacy.

The concept of development is more oriented towards equality than the welfare approach, and sets aside the attitude of treating women as the 'weaker' section of society. Development programmes cannot bring about a difference in the lives of a large section of women in our society, however, unless issues of gender inequality in our social institutions are addressed. Many erroneously think that women are a homogeneous group, with identical problems and priorities, yet Indian society is divided by caste, religion and class differences. The majority of women live in rural areas, and their problems and needs are different from those of urban women. Access to nutritious food, clean drinking water and primary health care may not be life's priorities for an urban woman, because these life-sustaining services are available to her. But for a rural woman who is struggling for her livelihood, these are indeed priorities. Meaningful change in their life situations can only occur when development efforts also address these issues.

The Women's Participation

Social planners, who are predominantly male, do not tend to ask women about their perceptions or needs. If they talk to women in a language they do not understand, propose programs that have no relevance to women's lives, and offer programs which can never be implemented in their circumstances, naturally the women will not show interest. This realization is only just dawning upon some of the development theorists and practitioners.

Development without people's participation is a meaningless exercise. Trainers who represent development programs cannot justify remaining out of touch with the needs of villagers or forest dwellers. They can propose or participate in a program for women only if they have firsthand knowledge of the practical realities. Development programs per se do not bring about growth; everyone involved needs to experience a sense of participation in order to generate results. Professor Rameshwari Indira,

sociologist and Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at Mysore University and specialist in women forest dwellers, provided the following example from her field studies.

Example:

On one occasion, a young woman stood up saying to a group of outside trainers, 'Wait, you don't have to train us, we already know those things. Instead, you should ask us what we want. Allow us to express our feelings you haven't lived in our circumstances and the forms of training you are offering us are irrelevant because we already quite well aware of these issues. We have been caring on these activities throughout our lives.'

Forest dwellers have the right to say in the management of forests because they have lived there for years. Committees do get set up, but many women are not informed and remain unaware that their names are included as members because male-dominated society traditionally withholds information from women. Even if women do attend meetings they are obliged to sit at the back, and the gender relations who prevail in their family and community constrain their active public participation. If any woman wants to speak up, she is often silenced with, 'Sit down, what do you know?' In some villages in India, men do not allow women to sit on chairs and refuse to participate in meetings where women are given a place on one of the chairs in the meeting.

Indian society keeps women apart. Women have difficulty articulating their feelings because they do not meet together and so have no opportunities to develop verbal communication skills. It is difficult for women to get together because traditionally they are restricted to their homes. In addition, women do not have access to education and information to facilitate their understanding of many of the things that are happening around them. During one meeting between the forest dwelling women and the Forest Department, however, women made it clear that their perspectives should be incorporated into resource management strategies. For example, a particular species that had been planted in their vicinity was attracting pests and polluting water resources. Had women been involved in the decision making, an eco-friendly, pro-people strategy could have been designed.

The Alcoholism

Most forest dwellers no longer sustain themselves through the forest because their livelihood has been destroyed by large industries. So they have had to become wage earners. During peak agricultural seasons the men earn about Rs 150 per day, but not one paisa is brought home and beat up their wives, who then have to go out and work for much lower wages in order to sustain the family. Although women have been waging a battle against the liquor lobby, the authorities concerned have not exhibited the will to control illegal liquor traders.

This example of the forest dwellers and alcohol is not isolated. It is representative of the conditions in families across India in tribal and rural areas, as well urban slum areas.

Women Organizations

UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) is the outcome of many years of political struggle by visionary women. An innovation in India is UNIFEM supported gender budgeting. The Indian Ministry of Finance added a chapter, 'Gender Equality in Macro Economic Policies' to the

annual economic survey as a result of pressure from women's organizations. The Finance Minister consulted women's groups in addition to industry and trade. The Indian Government has since agreed to institutionalize gender analysis of budgets in at least 20 states.

The issue of women's human rights was addressed for the first time in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights. Thanks to the domestic violence has been shifted from the private to public domain. Amnesty international has been authorized by the United Nations to examine domestic violence as an issue of human rights.

The Centre for Women Studies at the University of Mysore has had a very positive influence on the University's environment. The campus community has become sensitized to women's issues as a result of the Centre's programs. The existence of a movement implies that the pertinent issues have been thought about and talked about, and the larger community has been exposed to the important questions. In many cases, women did not realize that they were being oppressed, because they were used to it and accepted it as normal. Many women still feel that they have few, if any choices in life, and that being born a woman means you have to suffer.

Women and the Environment

The estimate that India lost 34% of its forest cover between 1974 and 1984 raises deep concerns about the eventual regional and global impact of this depletion. The destruction of the environment has also been due to poor distribution of resources, rapacious consumerism, war and growth policies.

Women are victims of environmental degradation and many are taking proactive roles by demanding participation in development planning and sustainable livelihood issues. Research into women and energy and the formulation of energy strategies, shows that rural women spend 8.73 hours a day per household in various domestic activities. Cooking is a major year round activity along with fuel gathering, fetching water 10-35% less than men for the same work.

The environment and ecology of any region has a critical relationship to women's lives, especially rural women who depend on the natural environment for their family's survival. In times of natural resource degradation and in the absence of any radical changes in society, they are forced to spend more time on activities related to family survival, at the cost of neglecting their health and their overall well-being.

Women in rural areas are very eager for knowledge. They attend meetings wherever possible. Active self-help groups of women exist throughout India. For example, self-help groups of women protect an individual who is being harassed or physically abused by her husband. They confront him as a group and warn him to desist from his violence. The self-help groups meet every week and discuss pertinent questions. An example of a system they have adopted is to impose a fine upon themselves for arriving late for meetings. The money collected goes into a fund of seed money, which can be used when necessary. In Chamarajnar, Karnataka, a group of women prevented a liquor shop from opening. This kind of empowerment can invoke social and community change.

More women need to organize themselves to raise issues that affect their lives and to find viable solutions to problems they face in day-to-day life. Awakening comes through organization and participation. Access to information is equally important. Many self-help groups have provided

continuous exposure to progressive ideas and involvement in programmes that bring positive changes to women's lives.

3.7 Intext Questions

1. What is empowerment?
2. What must a woman do to claim her rights to education, make decisions about her own life, etc?
3. What are the consequences of women and girls being denied education and being denied the right to make decisions about their own lives?
4. Why are women's legal rights disregarded or not acted upon?
5. Why are women's issues trivialized and how can this process be resisted?

3.8 Summary

A woman is as important as a man. Women's labor and efforts ensure the well being of society. A woman is called the first guru of a child. A child is nurtured physically, emotionally and spiritually by the mother, yet women experience discrimination and receive a secondary status in society. Women in India are generally viewed as physically weak, morally unreliable, economically a burden and intellectually incompetent. They are excluded from serious spiritual pursuits. Males are taught to assume a dominant position and women to assume a position of subservience. This unit has analyzed some of the challenges women face in a patriarchal and materialistic culture. It proposes ways in which women can claim their power and enjoy a complementary and equitable position in the family and social environments. It proposes that a society that honors and respects women will also honor and respect spiritual and human values.

An empowered woman is proud of herself and feels good about the fact that she is a woman. The prevailing cultural attitude, which many women absorb, is to feel ashamed and socialized to believe that she is not physically, emotionally or intellectually capable of doing many things that men can do. An empowered woman is aware and educated about her rights. She is free to make informed decisions and exercise those rights. She is free to make informed decisions and exercise those choices. An empowered woman is conscious of gender biases hidden within language, attitudes and practices. She identifies them and responds intelligently, that is, she demonstrates her ability to make choices based on understanding.

Domestic violence is a worldwide phenomenon. In India domestic violence is common and cuts across barriers of class, caste and religion. There is a long history of female infanticide in this country and female foeticide is currently on the increase. Young girls are married at a relatively early age in many rural areas and get caught in a relentless circle of marriage, motherhood, childcare and domestic drudgery.

At present many girls are withdrawn from school or college and married by force to a person chosen by their parents. Her rights exist in theory, but in practice she has no control over her body or her life. Family violence is one of the most oppressive blocks to women's emancipation. People are unaware that laws exist to protect victims of domestic violence.

Education and knowledge are frequently denied to girls. Either they are never enrolled in school, or they are withdrawn very easily. While more have gone to school than ever before, today nearly half the female population in India remains illiterate: Very few TV serials portray women who are empowered. Many advertisers and media controllers are averse to the concept of women's empowerment, Television programming often presents women who are harassed, exploited and trivialized. The media's message is that women should passively accept bigamy, false accusations and various forms of exploitation, both by men and by other women.

In 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights, the issue of women's human rights was addressed for the first time. Thanks to that domestic violence has been shifted from the private to the public domain. Amnesty International has been authorized by the United Nations to examine domestic violence as a human rights issue. Many women still feel they have no choice in life, and that being born a woman means you have to suffer.

3.9 Unit Assignment

Write an essay 1100-600 words on anyone of the following:

1. Why are changes made at the micro level more successful than those attempted at the macro level?
2. Why is the effort for women's rights ultimately an effort for human rights?
3. How are archaic social attitudes perpetuated?
4. What are the social and traditional factors which result in high levels of female foeticide and infanticide?
5. What is necessary for women to become empowered?

3.10 Glossary

Abuse : use badly or wrongly, insult, ill treatment or misuse

Exploitation : treat or use unfairly

Foeticides : killing of an unborn baby

Trampled : homeless person travels around a living by begging

Infanticide : the killing of an infant

Misogyny : man who hates women

Patriarchy : male head of a family or tribe

Profligacy : extravagant or wasteful, dissolute

Subordination : less important, treat as less important

Subservience : too willing to obey others, less important