
Unit-04 □ Problems of Women

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4.1 Introduction

God had created men and women both. But perhaps in no historical epoch are they enjoyed equal status and equal privilege. In different era of history they have experienced differences in their statuses. Therefore it is easy to say that there have been differences in the nature, depth and spread of the problem in different phases of history. In the time of the Upanishads the status of women were relatively better. There were no remarkable difference in the statuses of men and women. The equality was so much evident that both boys and girls had the sacred thread ceremony. In the Vedic age as well women were engaged in works like imparting education, attaining Swidhhi, or in spiritual works. As the words like Brahmacharini, Brahmabadini, Swidhhi, Tapasi, etc that started to be used from this era it can be easily inferred that women enjoyed equal status in that age. For example, a Vedic learned like Ustiti, or Truth seeker like Jabala, actually lived in the Vedic age. In the time of the Upanishad names like Gargi, Maitreyee, are important signifiers of the status women enjoyed during that period. This is how we see that in the ancient times, women were quite well known in crafts like dancing, singing, literature, philosophy etc. for example we can name a few- Apala, Urvasi, Lopamudra, Kunti and many others for their various talents and excellence in different fields. They were knowledgeable in practical as well as in spiritual fields. In the Buddhist era too there were women of substance such as Subha, Anupama, and Sumesa etc.

It is after this period that due to various influences of different social problems, women started to face social problems in the field of education and other areas. It is from this period that they were labeled as helpless and weak. The system of marriage was responsible for this in many respects. It is from this period onwards that the idea of ‘Pati

Parameswar' was reaped. As a result many other customs followed that registered downward status of women in this society. These are system of purdah, polygamy, etc.

In recent times the status of women is mixed. There is a class of women who have had the opportunity of education, have become conscious, been able to exercise their political right and have become economically viable. There are still others who enjoy some rights and privileges while stay on with some disadvantages of social life and therefore are sometimes prey to inequality and oppression. But most of the women in rural areas and those who live in the urban slums are in a class who are the most deprived section of the population. There is illiteracy, superstition, oppression, disregard, economic dependency, non-nutrition and ill health mixed with ready acceptance of the fate, associated with this class. But as women had to compromise on different aspects of living in every period of history, with the passage of time this has become more paramount and complex.

4.2 Structure of The Problem

The problems women face are importantly social, economic, political, cultural and psychological. These problems hinder their natural growth and development. The problems are as follows –

1. Problem of illiteracy and lack of education.
2. Social discrimination and inferior status.
3. Controlled movement and problems related to safety.
4. Discriminations in wages.
5. Economic dependence.
6. Enjoying limited political power.
7. Dowry.
8. Child marriage.
9. Inferiority complex.
10. Limited participation on administrative and managerial roles.

1. Problem of illiteracy and lack of education

Compared to the men women in India suffer from low literacy rate. It is a common idea that education is not that important for women. The best thing for them is to carry out household chores bring up children and so forth. This is the reason why there has been an apathetic attitude towards educating the women folk. It was never felt that women could earn and help the family with their innovative power. As a result the need to educate women never occurred to many. So right from the upper section till the bottom we see that

illiteracy and lack of education had been a perennial problem, which has engulfed most of the women of our society. In support of this argument a statistics can be provided.

Table 1 : Literacy Rate at different times

Years	Women	Men	Persons
1951	8.86	27.16	18.33
1961	28.03	40.40	28.03
1971	34.96	45.96	34.43
1981	43.57	56.38	43.57
1991	52.11	64.13	52.21
2001	53.67	75.26	64.84

Table 2 : Girl Dropouts Aged between 6-14

States	Percentages
West Bengal	37
Uttar Pradesh	52
Rajasthan	59
Bihar	62
Andhra Pradesh	45
Madhya Pradesh	45

From the above tables it can be seen that in every decade the rate of literacy for women has been lower than men. In 2001 that difference in literacy has been nearly 22. It can be well understood that girls are prey to oppression.

2. Social discrimination and inferior status

In the Constitution of India and the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations equal rights of both men and women have been recognized. But in reality, in India especially in the rural areas, women do not enjoy that status, freedom or right. In every sphere of the society, today's women experience disrespect and defamation of the rights and freedom they are supposed to get which, stands as a hindrance to their all round development. In their daily life from the small things such as food and nutrition to education, health or employment opportunity women experience inequality. As a result girl child is treated in a different way than a boy child. It has become evident in the general indifference towards the rights and freedom of girl child. Following this is the tendency that a woman has to be subordinate, weak, and inefficient. This thought and practice hinders the normal

development of women into persons. They are deprived, ill treated because they are women. This is again a hindrance towards the development of the society at large.

3. Controlled movement and problems related to safety

There are various sanctions ascribed on the free movement of women in this society. It is needless to say that such hindrances are not placed on the men. The systems of purdah, to confine women with household chores etc, are hindrances to the development of women in society. In order to enhance the possibility of emancipation of the inner self an environment that is conducive is definitely important. People are able to express their efficiency only after going through various experiences in life. Most of the Indian women are deprived in that sense. Indian women also perceive insecurity in their lives. It is a right of every citizen of a democratic country to have security in his or her movements, social justice, and the like. Why would anyone be deprived of these ? To express one's opinion in any circumstance is not a crime. But to express such free thought one needs social security too.

4. Discriminations in wages

It is a common opinion in India that all kinds of work are not meant for women even if she has the ability and efficiency to do that work. There has been some work especially unofficially designated for women. Every person according to their ability and efficiency work but women because of being deprived of the particular environment to express them cannot do so either. There are occupational differences related to gender as well as differential pay for the same kind of work. In recent times in the unorganized sector such discriminations have become rampant. And notwithstanding, these discriminations impart lower status on women in India. It is imperative to take steps to dismount such social discriminations immediately.

5. Economic dependence

In India economic dependence of women is another perennial problem. Economic independence happens to be the basis of all other kinds of freedom. There are a number of women who do not enjoy such freedom in the true sense of the term. Therefore there are quite a number of women in India who are forced to depend on others for their living till death.

6. Enjoying limited political power

Women in India have limited scope of traversing the political path compared to their male counterparts. In India 33% seat reservations are deemed for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. But at the highest level of policy decision-making institutions for implementation like the Parliament and the State Legislatures, woman participation is meagre.

7. Dowry

During or before marriage the custom of taking money or goods from the bride's family is called dowry. It is well known custom in urban and rural areas. It is customary

for the family of the bridegroom to take this in cash or in the form of goods. This custom is degrading and disrespectful for the women. As a person both men and women are equal. The practice of such custom at the gateway of married life is very degrading for a woman to handle. Women have the experience of going through series of torture at the hands of their in laws for dowry payments that are not according to their wants. It is also a persistent condition where marriage is postponed for not paying requisite amount of dowry to the in laws. The daughter of fathers who cannot subscribe to the wants of the bridegroom's family may remain a spinster all her life. For these entire reasons dowry has assumed the status of a massive problem in India.

8. Child marriage

To marry off children at a very early age is another important problem for women in India. Though the government has made it illegal but it still persists among various strata of the society. It is especially true for girls aged below 18 who are hurriedly married off by their parents citing poverty. But to marry off daughters before the age of 18 lead to a number of health and psychological problems later in life. So marriage during younger years is a problem faced by women in India.

9. Inferiority complex

It is in general that in India women in every sphere of their life is forced to experience that they are inferior to men. There are immense hindrances placed in front of girl children right from their childhood days. As a result their upbringing gets a jolt and which has an everlasting effect on their personality. This paves for an inferior understanding on the part of the girls in India. Inferiority is such a problem that leaves no way for a person to grow and develop naturally.

10. Limited participation in administrative and managerial roles

The rate of participation of women in policy decisions in different stages of decision-making system such as in the state, district or in the village level is very low. This signifies that women are backward with respect to their male counterparts. This leaves a lot of defects in the policy decisions. If women have had the opportunity of taking decisions and participating in the decision making process our country would have a better prospect of development. In that case women also would have the opportunity to channelise their grievances by their ability and efficiency.

4.3 The Problems of Atrocities Against Women

The oppression of women is not a new problem. The nature and variation of the atrocities committed are continually changing. There are regular events of atrocities being reported for dowry. In this case there is no poor-rich or rural-urban divide. There is also a regular increase in events like sex oppression and the like. The rising cases of sex

oppression in offices, transport systems, market places, social and cultural events have multiplied the anxiety over the issue. Since women are not economically independent they are easy prey to physical and psychological oppression. But the employers also subject working women to such nuances.

Generally women who are economically and educationally weak go for works in the unorganized sectors of which special mention should be made of housemaids. These women are the worst sufferers in this case. The condition of women engaged in flesh trade is more unbearable. This is how we see that atrocities against women are being organized in different aspects of life. The little amount of news regarding such nuances that come to surface is very painful. And whatever that remains beyond our knowledge is still immense.

4.4 Policy to Control The Problem

There have been a lot of rules, which has been implemented in independent India with respect to the problem. For example, in the Hindu Bill six different issues have been looked into-1. Marriage 2. Divorce 3. Succession in property 4. Adoption 5. Right to economic activity 6. Access to public places. It was envisaged that for the women to properly exercise their right the government would remain attentive to the issues. In 1958 a law was enacted to prohibit child workers and adolescent girls to work as sex workers. In 1856 the Hindu Widow Remarriage Law was enacted. Laws to stop rape and molestation have also been enacted. The punishment for rape is very severe. It can lead to imprisonment if proved. There are also important laws to stop eve teasing. Punishments like compensations in terms of money and imprisonment are delivered in case of such issues. The government has also taken steps to stop girl trafficking, which is again a criminal offence. The government is taking initiatives to draw the framework for laws to stop harassment of women in their working areas.

It is important to spread consciousness among the public regarding such issues. It is impossible to combat such vices by implementing laws alone. It is also important to eradicate differences between men and women to counter such a problem. Initiatives should be taken to educate both men and women and only then problems of women will perhaps come to an end. There have been initiatives on the part of the government to educate all and the public at large should also make the initiative to make maximum use of the opportunity. For example, there is a law that prohibits anyone from giving or taking dowry; the public should take proper legal steps whenever deemed necessary. If women become self-reliant their economic freedom will render them a better opportunity to excel and then the problems concerning women and the inequality there from will come to an end.

Economic independence is a very important issue. To strive for equality education is also very important. It is not possible to curb the problem by only implementing laws. So what is more important is social awareness and broadmindedness.

4.5 References

1. Rokea Kobir : 'Nari Samajer Abastha O Abasthan'.
2. Josodhara Bagchi (Ed) : 'Bharatiyo Mahila'.
3. Report of the Beijing Conference : Nari Mukti Andolon.

4.6 Exercise

1. What do you understand by the problem of women ? Give a detailed historical analysis of the problems faced by women ?
2. Are the problems women face and atrocities against women the same ? Explain both.
3. Write what you understand on the policies to control problems of women.