

---

## UNIT 1      SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

---

\*Manju L. Kumar

### Contents

- 1.0    Objection
- 1.1    Introduction
- 1.2    Analyzing Women's Situation: Conceptual Framework
- 1.3    Women's Situation in India: Historical Perspective
- 1.4    Strategies for Dealing with Women's Situation: Concepts and Application
- 1.5    Status of Women in India: Social and Demographic Analysis
- 1.6    Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7    Key Words
- 1.8    Suggested Readings
- 1.9    Answers to Check Your Progress

---

### 1.0    OBJECTIVES

---

The aim of this Unit is to give you an overview of the situation of women in India; historically and in contemporary Indian society. It attempts to provide you with an understanding of various concepts that are important in analyzing the current scenario. It also tries to familiarize you with different strategies that have been adopted nationally and internationally achieve women's development and improve their status in society. After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the conceptual framework significant for analyzing women's situation;
- discuss women's situation in India over the time; and
- describe various strategies that have been adopted to empower women, improve their status in society and achieve their overall development.

---

### 1.1    INTRODUCTION

---

Women who constitute almost half of the world's population are known to suffer from many social and economic disadvantages. For centuries women have been suppressed, oppressed, deprived and discriminated against. Women are perceived as one of the target groups by professional social workers as the profession is committed to offer necessary interventions to the deprived sections of society so as to help them grow and develop and lead satisfying lives with dignity.

It is, therefore, important to understand the social environment in which women live and the factors that result in their suppression and deprivation. Fortunately, there is an increasing concern to rectify this situation globally and especially in India. It is worthwhile to learn about the efforts being made to deal with women's issues and concerns. It is equally crucial to analyze and critically review the same. Only then can we hope to comprehend women's situation.

Understandably, the focus of our discussion will be on the Indian scene although it is important to see how we in India are influenced by the thoughts generated across the world. We shall, therefore, identify the conceptual framework, which can help us analyze women's situation in India.

---

## 1.2 ANALYZING WOMEN'S SITUATION: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

---

'Status' and 'role' of women in the society are the two major concepts of women empowerment, which must be closely looked into and studied well for understanding the current situation of women in the society.

**Status** is a social position in a society with its associated advantages and obligations. Being a part of the social web, this position is linked naturally to other social positions. In a purely sociological sense, status does not imply any grading, ranking or hierarchy among different social positions. However, the very fact that a particular social position carries certain benefits, privileges or powers and these positions are related to each other, some status positions are seen as superior to others. It is in this context that the status position of women is seen as inferior to that of men in any given society.

Each status position is expressed in terms of a **Role**. "Role denotes a set of expectations and obligations associated with a particular status position within a group or social situation. The expectations and obligations entailed by a role are in terms of activities and qualities" (GOI, 1974).

Each individual occupies more than one social position or statuses within a society. Therefore, he/she performs a variety of roles. Performance of multiple roles in varied social situations often leads to changes in role perception of individuals. A woman performs a number of roles as wife, housewife (homemaker), mother, daughter or sister. She may also be a teacher, manager, factory worker or farmer. Her status is not determined by any one of these but by a composite of all of these taken together. Some of these may be in conflict or incompatible with each other. The gaps in expected ideal behaviour and the actual behaviour in fast changing socio-economic realities impose serious constraints on women.

How the social positions or status of women and men are juxtaposed and perceived in any society at a given point of time determines the relative values or importance ascribed to their assigned roles. This is what decides the power, privileges or advantages she will be allowed to enjoy vis-à-vis men.

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex, whereas Gender identity is one's sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender" (American Psychological Association, 2006). When one's gender identity and biological sex are not similar, the individual may identify as transsexual or as another transgender category. Gender equality and female empowerment are now universally recognized as core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights, and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. This concept helps in seeing women not as an isolated group but always equal to men and 'contributors' for development. It is crucial to understand the inequalities suffered by a woman because of her sex. Her

specific needs and problems, interests and perspectives are brought into focus keeping in mind her experiences in relation to men.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) Why do professional social workers need to know about women's situation?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2) What do you understand by the concepts of status and role? How do they apply to women's situation?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### 1.3 WOMEN'S SITUATION IN INDIA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discussion about women's situation involves looking at what position they hold in any given society at a given point of time. The situation of women varies across place and time because their position is determined by existing social structure and social relationships. Social structure, consisting of patterns of social relationships, is not static and manifests itself in the social change process in any society.

Looking at Indian women's situation in a historical perspective helps us understand the reasons and process of the phenomenon of women's subordinate status and devaluation of their roles, duties and tasks as compared to those of men, their deprivation and exploitation, and finally efforts to improve women's status.

1) **The Vedic Age** is supposed to be the golden era of women's status in India. On the basis of available Vedic literature, we can say that women were treated better and enjoyed more rights than in later times. They had full access to education evidenced by references to women like Gargi, Maitreyi, and Aditi. Women had freedom to choose their own life partners. The age at marriage was higher. Women had an important place in performance of rituals, *yajnas* and other religious ceremonies. However, being a patriarchal society, mothers of sons had a special status in society.

2) The situation seems to have changed for the worse in the **Post-Vedic Period** (Puranic and later times) when the status of women was made inferior to that of men. The post-Vedic period is characterized by ambivalence towards women. Women were visualized both as goddesses or shakti to be worshipped and temptresses to be shunned at the same time. The

great epics put mothers of sons and faithful wives on a high pedestal. Except in the form of deities or mothers, women were seldom seen as equal to men. With the apparent goal of solidifying family as a social institution, Manu established the *principle of purity* as the basis of a code of social conduct. Women were seen as the most potential danger to purity of the family lineage. They were, therefore, restricted to the four walls of their home. Religious prescriptions and social practices reinforced each other to relegate women to secondary status.

The outcome of this perception of women was denial of education to women—denial to read Vedas or chant mantras. The role of a married woman was confined to her home and to serve her husband faithfully. She could attain her salvation through self-less service to her husband, taking care of his daily needs so that he could meditate and perform vedic rites. Manu, who is held responsible for the fate women suffered for more than two millennia, considered women in constant need of protection and supervision.

As a result, gradually, early or child marriages came to be a norm. The preference for a son to carry on the lineage and the problems of protecting girls led to female infanticide. A *pativrata* wife could not imagine getting linked to any other man and hence, if the husband died, she was expected to opt for self-immolation. Sati got a status equal to that of deities. A woman's sins were considered to be responsible for her husband's death and so, widows were considered inauspicious.

- 3) Right through the **Muslim and Mughal** rule, these social practices got firmly entrenched in the Indian social fabric. The threat of Muslim invaders pushed women further into isolation and misery.
  - 4) At the advent of the **British in India**, the status of women had reached its nadir – the lowest pit. Women were ignorant and illiterate; were bound by innumerable rituals and fasts; married early and were treated as property and a most menial servant of the husband. Widowhood was a curse and carried with it a most miserable life. Remarriage of widows was an unthinkable crime. Sati often was chosen, by the family and women themselves, as an option to escape this lot. Parents killed their female infants to save themselves. This was mostly the situation of women of upper castes. Women from lower castes had their own problems. They were not as restricted as women of upper castes as they had to work on the fields or in the households of the rich upper caste families but all, including the husbands, treated them as slaves without any rights or dignity.
- a) It was in this scenario that the Indian **social reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century** took up the task of improving women's deplorable condition. Starting from Raja Ram Mohan Roy, many upper caste English educated men in Bengal and Maharashtra and later in the South made women's issues the focus of the reform movement during the early British period. Influenced by western education, they tried to bring out the fact that scriptures did not support subjugation of women. Their social status gave them an important voice and influenced the neutral British government to enact laws to ban *Sati* and raise the age at marriage (Age of Consent Bill). Many schools were opened for girls; widow homes were established to give shelter and protection to widows and a number of reformers supported remarriage of widows. Similar reform movements were initiated in other religious affiliations, communities and regions.

- b) The second phase of this reform movement was the emergence of leadership among the women themselves. Women like Pandita Rama Bai and Ramabai Ranade started widow sadans and girls' schools and spoke openly against evil social practices affecting women. The establishment of the All India Women's Conference in 1917 was the first organized attempt by women to look into women's issues related to education, marriage and family and voting rights.
- 5) Being elitist in nature, the impact of various reform movements reached only the upper and middle castes, and more so in the urban areas. It remained for **Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist freedom movement** to reach the masses and achieve social transformation. Women's large-scale participation in the freedom struggle was facilitated by two major factors: use of non-violence and self-sacrifice and the metaphor of Mother India applied to all women. It invoked women's existing image of a mother sacrificing all for the family – in this case the large family being the whole of India. Women's projected qualities of tenderness and self-sacrifice silenced all objections of their immediate families. Women participated in all spheres of the Movement – whether from within the home environs or out on the streets. The agenda of the National Congress included equality and dignity for women. The Nationalist Movement brought to the surface the significance of women's roles and contributions as also the various forms of exploitation and discriminations they had to suffer. This greatly facilitated women's issues and concerns to get into focus and finally got reflected in our Constitution after Independence.
- 6) We now come to the **period after independence** and adoption of our Constitution that enshrines the dreams and aspirations of Indian people and the image of an ideal society where everyone is considered equal irrespective of religion, caste or gender. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted about that time also influenced the Constitution. The period after Independence was marked by a number of efforts undertaken both by the Government and the Voluntary sector to uplift women's status.
- i) The concern in safeguarding the rights and privileges of women found its best expression in our **Constitution**. It removed discrimination against women in both legal and public domains. Fundamental Rights in the Constitution ensured that women would not face discrimination on account of their sex. The State, however, was empowered to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women due to the suppression faced by them for centuries. Directive Principles of State Policy enjoined upon the State to ensure safe and humane conditions of work for women. Article 51A(e) imposed a fundamental duty on every citizen not to indulge in practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- ii) Constitutional safeguards were translated into practice by enacting several **legislations** covering the wide spectrum of women's lives. "The large participation of women in the freedom struggle and the progressive ideas pushed forward by the social reformers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a flurry of legislative activity during the 1950s benefiting particularly Hindu women" (Agrawal & Rao, p. 26). These included the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. Laws have been passed to legalize abortion, to raise age at marriage and to settle family disputes. The laws have also been passed to combat social evils like dowry, sati, rape, indecent representation of women, female infanticide, etc. Many of the Directive

Principles have already become law, like the Maternity Benefit Act and Equal Pay for Equal Work. Although there are numerous laws governing employment, wages, working conditions, social security, welfare and other aspects of labour, not many relate exclusively to women. Some acts were enacted keeping the spirit of Personal Laws of other religious communities in mind.

The main thrust of development efforts in post independent India has been reflected in the Five-year Plans. The approaches of looking at problems and needs of women and identifying strategies to help women grow and develop have changed over time. The change has been in terms of emphasis, organizational infrastructure and the goals of strategies adopted. The development policies have reflected a transition of approaches to dealing with women's concerns: from 'welfare' approach (first to fifth plans) to 'development' (sixth to eighth plans) and finally to 'empowerment' (ninth and tenth plans).

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What were the main reasons for women's low status in the post-Vedic period?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2) What was the condition of women at the advent of the British in India?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3) What efforts were made by 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers to improve women's conditions?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4) What was the impact of the Nationalist Movement on women?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5) What safeguards did the Constitution of India guarantee to women?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6) What are the three main approaches reflected in the five-year plans?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

**1.4 STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH WOMEN’S SITUATION: CONCEPTS AND APPLICATION**

---

We shall now briefly discuss different approaches so as to understand how these shaped developmental policies and programmes for improving women’s status and eliminated the disabling social environment surrounding them.

**Welfare Approach**

In the 1950s and early 1960s, resources were directed primarily to market oriented productive activities and the residual welfare assistance was directed to vulnerable groups of which women formed an important segment. Programmes on nutrition, home economics and child welfare sought to reinforce women’s roles as mothers, wives and homemakers. They were seen as primarily responsible for the well-being of the family with little recognition of their role in productive development activities. This approach was based on western stereotypes of the nuclear family in which women are economically dependent on the male breadwinners.

**The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56)** outlined the philosophy of “promoting the welfare of women so that they could play their legitimate role in the family and the community”. Much of the responsibility of providing services to the vast female population was left to the voluntary sector. Central Social Welfare Board was established to encourage voluntary organizations to take up welfare activities and to provide support to them. The family was the basic unit for receiving welfare benefits. It was presumed that benefits of economic development targeted by the plans would reach families and percolate to women too. **The Second Plan (1956-61)** continuing with the basic approach of the First Plan, recognized issues like organization of women workers and women’s working conditions. **The Third, Fourth and the Fifth Plans** paid some attention to conditions of the girl child – her education, health and nutritional needs. There was a modicum of social security through maternity benefits and widow pensions. The emphasis continued on women’s education, health (immunization, nutritional supplement for nursing and expectant mothers) and welfare services only. The services provided to women were mainly curative and ameliorative in nature. The Fifth Plan gave priority to training of women who were in need of care and protection. It also focused on women from low-income families, needy women with dependent children and working women. However, “there was a conceptual thrust (even though inadequately articulated) towards actively involving and stimulating the participation of women’s organizations in the process of change” (Agrawal & Rao, p. 36).

**Women in Development (WID):** In the early 1970s, the Women in Development (WID) concept emerged. The philosophy underlying this approach is that women are lagging behind in society and the gap between men and women can be bridged by remedial measures within the existing structures. The WID approach started to recognize women as direct actors in

social, political, cultural and working life. It recognizes women as producers and contributors to the economy and seeks to integrate women in development by improving their access to resources and benefits. Since the mainstream development agenda in the 1970s focused on poverty and basic needs, it was possible to demonstrate that women were predominantly represented in the ranks of the poorest of the poor and were largely responsible for meeting the basic needs of their family. The critical significance of women's contribution in any effort to maximize returns to development investments was increasingly emphasized (Sharma 2004, p. 220).

The Report of the Commission on Status of Women in India in 1974 stated that despite developmental policies and governmental efforts, the condition of women continued to be deplorable; their status in society was very low; and they suffered various forms of discrimination and exploitation. Drawing inspiration from this Report, the representations from the women's organizations and the guidelines provided by the UN World Plan of Action, the **Sixth Plan (1980-85)** carried an independent chapter on 'Women and Development'. The chapter expressed concern about declining sex ratio, lower life expectancy among women and continued low status of women in society. They recognized women as vital human resources whose development was expected to contribute significantly to overall National Development. Women were no longer viewed as targets of welfare policies in the social sector. The Plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on core sectors of health, education and employment. Improving women's access to training and employment became the focus of the new approach. Most of the women's issues were handed over to the newly formed Ministry of 'Human Resource Development'. Central Social Welfare Board came within the newly constituted Ministry. Through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Training Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM) and Women's Development Corporations, efforts were made to promote self-employment among women, particularly from weaker sections of society, through training, credit through microfinance, marketing support, etc., through organized groups of women.

**The Seventh Plan (1985-90)** emphasized an integrated approach to dealing with women's development, covering women's concerns like education, health, nutrition, training and employment, awareness generation and confidence building. A full-fledged Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development was made the nodal agency to integrate women-related schemes in different sectors like Education, Health, Industry, Labour and Science and Technology.

The WID approach did not have a direct impact on development because it provided women with additional resources but no power to manage these resources. The WID concept led to increased workloads and heavy schedules for women and prevented their empowerment.

**Participatory Approach:** The basic thrust of **The Eighth Plan (1992-97)** was on the organization and strengthening of women's groups at the grass root level so that they could play a decisive role in the planning and implementation of various developmental programmes rather than remain only the beneficiaries of these programmes. The Plan recognized the devaluation of women's work being mostly in the informal sector and emphasized the need to secure "greater societal awareness of their contribution to national well-being" (GOI, the Eighth Five Year Plan). Besides setting up of the National

Commission for Women to safeguard women's rights, Indira Mahila Yojana was launched to encourage an integrated approach to women's empowerment through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The most far-reaching development during this period is the enactment of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts leading to large-scale participation of women in the affairs of the local bodies.

**Gender and Development (GAD):** In the 1980s, the Gender and Development approach emerged as a result of WID and its shortcomings, concentrating on the unequal relations between men and women due to "unequal playing fields". The term gender arose as an analytical tool from an increasing awareness of inequalities due to institutional structures.

The focus on gender rather than on women was originally developed to differentiate the perception of women's problems in terms of their biological differences with men and the perception rooted in terms of social relationships between men and women. After about 30 years of the WID approach, the sluggish rate of change in women's material condition led to the conclusion that lesser power in social relations which is institutionalized in gender relations (as well as in class and race relations) was inhibiting their capacity to profit from improved access to social and economic resources.

This approach is gaining ground as it has moved away from looking at women as beneficiaries of welfare programmes. Instead, it seeks to include them in the development agenda and questions the very developmental paradigm that has had an adverse impact on women. It calls for adopting a transformatory strategy in policy interventions. It emphasizes that women have to be empowered to counter the institutional barriers in households, communities, markets and the State that come in the way of getting and making use of opportunities (Aga Khan Foundation 2001, p.101).

Another approach, which together with GAD has shaped the Ninth and finally the Tenth Plan, is empowerment.

**Empowerment** implies the process of enabling sections of people deprived of their right to have a 'level playing ground with the privileged'. True empowerment comes when the affected people themselves feel empowered. Besides economic, political or legal components of empowerment, development of a positive attitude towards self, higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence among women are essential ingredients of the process of empowerment (Agrawal Rao, xiv). The process of empowerment also implies enabling an individual (in this case women) to make her own choices. Indiresan (2001) defines empowerment as "a process that helps people gain control of their lives through raising awareness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control". [Quoted by Agrawal and Rao, p.195]

**The Ninth Plan (1997-2002)** committed itself to empowering women as agents of social change and development. It adopted the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) with a view to creating an enabling environment for women to exercise their rights both within and outside the home, as equal partners along with men. The Ninth Plan took the first real step to ensure flow of adequate development funds for the benefit of women. The Plan directed both the Centre and the states to adopt a special strategy of "Women's Component Plan" through which, not less than 30% of funds/benefits should be earmarked in all the women-related sectors (Department of Women and Child Development, Annual Report 2002-03). The National Policy for Empowerment of Women also envisaged the introduction

of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy. The gender analysis of budgets found that allocations on women specific and pro-women schemes had increased by 3% and 23% respectively (GOI, Department of Women and Child Development, Annual Report 2002-03). But the Ninth Plan did not make any commitment for achieving any specific goal or target. Change and development was not spelt out in specific terms.

One of the strategies of the **Tenth Plan (2002-07)** is to implement a National Plan of Action for the Empowerment of Women. This plan for the first time fixed certain measurable targets in the social, economic and environmental sectors to be achieved during the plan period (Annual Report, 2002-03). Out of 15 such targets, at least four are related to women and children. These are: a) reduction of gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by at least 50%, reduction of infant mortality rate to two 45 per 1000 live births, c) reduction of maternal mortality rate two per 1000 live births, and d) all children to complete five years of schooling by 2007. Four more targets are related to women indirectly, that is, related to poverty reduction, reduction in population growth, increase in literacy rates and access to potable drinking water in all the villages. A sector-specific three-fold strategy based on the prescriptions of the National Policy, comprising social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice, is proposed to be followed. Social empowerment aims at creating “an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes of development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potential” (GOI, The Tenth Five Year Plan). Economic empowerment would “ensure provision of training, employment and income-generating activities...with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent” (GOI, The Tenth Five Year Plan). Gender justice seeks to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and enables women to enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms on an equal footing with men.

Women’s discrimination is a common phenomenon in Indian society. In fact, still now, they are ill-treated by their families in terms of low intake of food, lack of educational attainments and in both public and private spheres. Before sixth five year plan, there was no provision for women’s cause. However, seventh and eighth plans emphasized on women’s development and women empowerment. But since the 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan women are considered as a category of the notion of inclusive growth as it is attached with notion of inclusive democracy. We know that despite being half of the population, their voice was not counted in various decisions making bodies. Democracy is based on the principle of equality. We can see that both the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> five year plans have stressed on the importance on inclusive growth. Although the Five Years Plans were put to rest in 2015, women are included in the development process for the country’s progress.

### **Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer those provided at the end of this unit.

1) Differentiate between the welfare and WID approaches to improving women’s situation

in India.

2) How did adoption of WID approach affect developmental programmes for women in India?

3) Explain the main features of the GAD approach.

---

### 1.5 STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA: SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

---

With significant Constitutional safeguards, numerous progressive legislations enacted to protect the interests of women and the developmental policies and programmes adopted to initiate and sustain the efforts to raise women's status in society and to bring women at par with men in all spheres of life, we could assume that women would have achieved high social status and received equal opportunities for personal growth. We need to look at some hard facts that give an indication of the real impact of these measures on the status of women in India.

Two visible changes that are required to achieve gender parity include creation of enabling environments and real changes in social attitudes.

There have been significant social changes in India since independence. Increasing entry of women into higher education and non-household employment combined with the gradual breakdown of the traditional joint family system have had their impact on the social life of the country. The emergence of nuclear families might have resulted in women having relatively greater say in household affairs. The loss of traditional systems of social security has raised concomitant problems of care of the aged and care of children. Participation of women in out of house jobs might have opened greater opportunities for their growth and development. However, this has brought in its wake heavier workload and mental stress.

Among the factors that have vitiated the impact of the social changes include the rigid social values and deep-seated prejudices. It is not only the society that treats women as inferior and

secondary to men; their work and expected roles considered as unproductive and of less value than those of men. Women often internalize this image of them and learn through a complicated socialization process, initiated by women themselves, that men were indeed superior to them.

The following social realities amply indicate the status of women in India today:

- There still prevails a preference for a son over a daughter;
- Stereotyping of gender-based roles occurs even now;
- Her work at home goes unaccounted for even in the national level statistics;
- Power and decision making is shared unequally by men and women and the scale is tilted in the favour of men;
- Domestic violence goes uncontested and unreported;
- Crimes against women like molestation, rape, sexual harassment at the workplace are on the increase;
- Dual responsibilities are not accepted by the men at home;
- Lack of access to and control of family and community assets and resources, irrespective of their contributing to the same;
- Low image of women in society manifest through social attitudes and practices.

### **Demographic Analysis**

For the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of development, certain development indicators have been identified. Some of the indicators which are used for evaluating development of women in India and elsewhere include sex ratio, health status indicators (like infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, maternal morbidity rates, nutritional status, life expectancy at birth), educational status (like school enrolment of the female child at elementary, high and technical education, drop out rate), nature and extent of employment (ratio in the work force, types of trades/professions, remuneration etc.), age at marriage, participation in political institutions and crimes against women.

The ratio of number of women per thousand men in a population, the sex ratio is accepted as a summary indicator of the gender equality in any society. The results of the Census of 2001 indicate a sex ratio of 933, which is well below the 1000 mark. The fact that the sex ratio in India has been steadily declining is a well-known fact. This is further compounded by regional variations. Also, this decline is not associated with low economic development. Rather, relatively more prosperous states of Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi have a sex ratio less than the national average. This confirms the view that economic prosperity may not change people's outlook about gender issues. Higher sex ratio is linked to higher level of women's empowerment (as evident in southern states) and higher levels of education and health status of women. Sex ratio contributes to the Gender Development Index (GDI) accepted globally and places India quite low on the GDI scale. The GDI, as you may know, is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions—a long and

healthy life, knowledge and decent standard of living—adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.

Some reasons commonly forwarded (Registrar General of India, 2001) for declining sex ratio are:

- Sex determination before birth and eliminating female foetuses (Female births);
- Killing of girl children (Female infanticide);
- Neglect of girl children—denial of adequate nutrition and access to health facilities and imposition of household chores at a tender age;
- In spite of declining infant mortality rates, the relative gap between males and females has been increasing; and
- High maternal mortality;

Declining sex ratio is a silent emergency. But the crisis is real and its persistence has profound and frightening implications for society and the future of humankind.

The lowest-ever child sex ratio of 914 overshadowed an increase in the overall sex ratio, which is now 940—the highest nationwide since Census 1971 and a shade lower than 1961—as it reflects a continued preference for a male child. As per the provisional data of Census 2011 recently, while the overall sex ratio plummeted to 914 from 927. Sex ratio is the number of women against 1,000 boys in the age group of 0-6.

You will be learning more about low rates of female participation in education, employment and political activities, poor treatment of women within the family and legal framework for redressing problems in the Units to follow.

The social and demographic analyses show that we have to go a long way before we can achieve gender justice comparable to other countries with higher GDI.

---

## **1.6 LET US SUM UP**

---

After having gone through centuries of subjugation and discrimination, it is heartening to note that there is a concerted effort to improve women's status in society and to help powerless women achieve empowerment. An increasing awareness in the society about women's needs, problems and their own perspectives has been brought about by our social thinkers, developmental policies and plans, governmental programmes, voluntary action and women's movements at the national and international levels. The major corrective measures began with the Constitutional Safeguards, followed by protective legislations. The developmental policies and plans have reflected transition in the approaches and strategies adopted in the country for raising women's status and helping women achieve self-development. In fact, the trends in this transition demonstrate the society's commitment to gradually accept women not as mere passive recipients of welfare services and benefits of development but as active partners in the process of development. That women still lagged behind men in having a fair share of the fruits of development soon came to the surface. Greater participation in economic activities to provide economic independence was seen as a

vehicle for women's emancipation and raising of status did not bring the desired results. In fact, this led to women handling heavier workloads and suffering from mental stress.

It was in this scenario that due to women's studies and action, the gender bases of social relationships and social power structure was highlighted. It was realized that different developmental initiatives – economic, social, political or environmental – impact men and women differently. The Human Development Reports maintained that the Gender Development Index was a better indicator of development of any society than development indicators (with a tilt in favour of economic development) taken in isolation.

The gender and development approach heralded the empowerment of women as a major agenda of social development while contextualizing their situation in relation to men.

At the same time, the social attitudes and prejudices, deeply entrenched in the social psyche, cannot be expected to disappear simply because the entire world is expressing the need for women's empowerment. The social and demographic analyses manifest continued neglect and deprivation of women. The serious threats to women's life, security and well-being are widely demonstrated in different spheres of contemporary society.

In order to achieve sustainable development, both men and women have to comprehend their stakes in continued low status and exploitation of women. Instead of perceiving the efforts for achieving women's self-development as a threat, men need to look at the adverse consequences of women's low status for sustainable development for everyone. Women also need to shed their feeling of helplessness and accept the challenges of social change.

---

### 1.7 KEY WORDS

---

<b>Status</b>	:	A social position in a society with its associated advantages and obligations
<b>Role</b>	:	A set of expectations and obligations associated with a particular status, position within a group or social situation.
<b>Strategy</b>	:	Plan, approach or line of attack
<b>Demography</b>	:	A science of vital and social statistics

---

### 1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Aga Khan Foundation (2001), *Understanding Women's Experiences in Natural Resource Management*, Aga Khan Foundation, New Delhi.

Agrawal, Rashmi & B.V.L.N. Rao (2004), *Gender Issues: A Road Map to Empowerment*, Shipra Publications, Delhi.

Department of Women and Child Development, *Annual Report 2002-03*, Government of India, New Delhi.

Department of Women and Child Development (2000), *Platform for Action: Five Years After – An Assessment*, GOI.

Department of Women and Child Development, *Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing 1995, Country Report, GOI, 1995.

Department of Women and Child Development (1992), *National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991-2000 AD)*, GOI.

Goel, Aruna (2004), *Organization and Structure of Women Development and Empowerment*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

Government of India, Planning Commission, *The Tenth Five Year Plan*.

Ministry of Education and Social Welfare (1974), Department of Social Welfare, *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*, GOI, New Delhi.

Sharma, Usha (2004), *Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Rights*, Authors press, Delhi.

---

## 1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

---

### Check Your Progress I

- 1) Women are perceived as one of the target groups by professional social workers as the profession is committed to offer necessary interventions to the deprived sections of society so as to help them grow and develop and lead satisfying lives with dignity. Knowing about women's social conditions will help social workers understand their needs and problems and the social environment surrounding them.
- 2) Status is a social position in a society with its associated advantages and obligations. Being a part of the social web, this position is linked naturally to other social positions. Each status position is expressed in terms of a role. Each individual occupies more than one social position or statuses within a society. Therefore, he/she performs a variety of roles.

How the social positions or status of women and men are juxtaposed and perceived in any society at a given point of time determines the relative values or importance ascribed to their assigned roles. This is what decides the power, privileges or advantages she will be allowed to enjoy vis-à-vis men.

### Check Your Progress II

- 1) During the post-Vedic period, women were seldom seen as equal to men. Women were denied dignity except in the form of deities or mothers. With an apparent goal of solidifying the family as a social institution, Manu established the *principle of purity* as the basis for a code of social conduct. Women were seen as the most potential danger to purity of the family lineage. They were, therefore, restricted to the four walls of their home. Religious prescriptions and social practices reinforced each other to relegate women to secondary status.
- 2) At the advent of the British in India, the status of women had reached its nadir-the lowest pit. Women were ignorant and illiterate; were bound by innumerable rituals and fasts; married early and were treated as property and a most menial servant of the husband. Widowhood was a curse and carried with it a most miserable life.

Remarriage of widows was an unthinkable crime. Sati often was chosen by the family and women themselves, as an option to escape this lot. Parents killed their female infants to save themselves and their daughters the cruel life awaiting them.

- 3) Indian social reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took up the task of improving women's deplorable condition. Starting from Raja Ram Mohan Roy, many upper caste, educated men in Bengal and Maharashtra and later in the South made women's issues the focus of the reform movement during the early British period. Influenced by western education, they tried to bring out the fact that scriptures did not support subjugation of women. They induced the British government to enact laws to ban Sati and raise the age at marriage (Age of Consent Bill). Many schools were opened for girls; widow homes were established to give shelter and protection to widows and number of reformers supported remarriage of widows. Similar reform movements were initiated in other religious affiliations, communities and regions.
- 4) Women's large-scale participation in the freedom struggle was one of the outcomes of Gandhi's mass movement. Women participated in all spheres of the Movement – whether from within the home environs or out on the streets. The agenda of the National Congress included equality and dignity for women. The Freedom Struggle brought to the surface the significance of women's roles and contributions as also the various forms of exploitation and discriminations they had to suffer. This greatly facilitated addressing women's issues and concerns and enabled these issues to get reflected in our Constitution after Independence.
- 5) The Constitution of India removed discrimination against women in both the legal and public domain. Fundamental Rights in the Constitution ensured that women would not face discrimination on account of their sex. Directive Principle of State Policy enjoined upon the State to ensure safe and humane conditions of work for women. Article 51A (e) imposed a Fundamental duty on every citizen not to indulge in practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- 6) The development policies operationalized through the Five-Year Plans have reflected a transition of approaches in dealing with women's concerns: from 'welfare' approach (first to fifth plans) to 'development' (sixth to eighth plans) and finally to 'empowerment' of women and gender-based development initiatives (ninth and tenth plans).

### **Check Your Progress III**

- 1) The welfare approach considered women's advancement as a mere by product of general development. Women remained passive recipients of benefits of developments receiving welfare assistance provided to help those in need for survival.

WID perceived women as active partners in the process of development. They were considered valuable human resources. The critical significance of women's contribution in any effort to maximize returns to development investments was increasingly emphasized.

- 2) The Sixth Plan adopted this approach for the first time. Women's education, vocational training and employment were considered as investment in national

development. The Plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach with three-pronged thrust on core sectors of health, education and employment. Improving women's access to training and employment became the focus of the new approach. Most of the women's issues were handed over to the newly formed Ministry of 'Human Resource Development'. Central Social Welfare Board came within the newly constituted Ministry. Through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and Women's Development Corporations, efforts were made to promote self-employment among women, particularly from weaker sections of society, through training, credit through microfinance, marketing support, etc., through organized group of women.

- 3) The focus on gender rather than on women was originally developed to differentiate the perception of women's problems in terms of their biological differences with men and the perception rooted in terms of social relationships between men and women. After about 30 years of the WID approach, the sluggish rate of change in women's material condition led to the conclusion that lesser power in social relations which is institutionalized in gender relations (as well as in class and race relations) was inhibiting their capacity to profit from improved access to social and economic resources.

This approach is gaining ground as it has moved away from looking at women as beneficiaries of welfare programmes. Instead, it seeks to include them in the development agenda and questions the very developmental paradigm that has had an adverse impact on women. It situates women in the larger analysis of gender relations and does not favour viewing them in isolation. It calls for adopting a transformatory strategy in policy interventions. It emphasizes that women have to be empowered to counter the institutional barriers in households, communities, markets and the State that come in the way of making use of opportunities.