

Women Change the World

Women have been facing inequalities at every step.

By getting an education, women have got opportunities to rise in every field.

Women's movement has risen to challenge discrimination in all parts of the world.

Fewer Opportunities and Rigid Expectation

- A lot of people feel that women are fit only for certain kinds of jobs as a nurse. They are not fit for technical jobs.
- In most families, women are taught that after school they have to get married. Laxmi Lakra, however, broke this stereotype image when she became the first woman engine driver of the Northern Railways.
- We live in a society full of pressures. If boys do not work hard and get a good salary they are bullied

Learning for Change

- Going to school is an important part of life.
- Today, it is difficult for us to imagine that school and learning could be seen as out of bounds or not appropriate for some children.
- In the past, very few people learnt reading and writing. Most children learnt the work their families or elders did. Even in families where skills like pottery, weaving and craft were taught, the contribution of daughters and women was seen as secondary.
- In the nineteenth century, new ideas about learning and education appeared. But there was a lot of opposition to educating girls ever then.
- In the 1890s, Ramabai championed the cause of women's education.
- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain learnt English from her elder brother and an elder sister in spite of family opposition and went on to become a famous writer.
- Rashundari Devi of Bengal was the first Indian woman to write an autobiography called 'Amar Jiban'.

Schooling and Education Today

Today both boys and girls attend school in large numbers.

The difference in Their Education Still Remains

- Today education is the right of both boys and girls, despite that only 50 % of the girls receive an education.

- India has a census every 10 years which counts the population of the country. This information is used to measure things like literacy, sex-ratio, etc.
- A huge number of SC and ST children leave school at an early age. The 2014 census even shows that Muslim girls are less likely than Dalit girls to complete primary school.
- Many reasons like non-availability of teachers and schools, lack of transport, cost of education, indifferent attitude of teachers and parents are responsible for the negligence of education.

Women's Movement

- Women have individually and collectively struggled to bring about changes. This is called the Women's Movement.
- Different strategies have been used to spread awareness, fight discrimination and seek justice.
- These movements are related to campaigning, raising awareness, protesting and showing solidarity.
- Men and women in society are looked upon as playing specific gender roles.

Women have been facing inequalities at every step since time immemorial. No doubt, their position and status have been improved with the change of time, still, they lag behind men in almost every field.

In this male-dominated society, they fail to avail equal privileges and opportunities.

It has also been seen that some occupations are considered to be more suitable for men than for women. It means women are good at only certain jobs.

Many people believe that women make better nurses because they are more patient and gentle. It is also believed that women do not bear technical mind and therefore they are not capable of dealing with technical things. Thus, they have been stereotyped as good nurses, good teachers, etc. They are never seen as army officers, pilots, railway engine drivers, etc.

A majority of Indians believe in these stereotypes. It is, therefore, girls do not get the same support that boys do to study and train to become doctors and engineers.

Today's women have become very aware. They are determined to break these stereotypes by excelling them in fields which were considered male preserves till now. We have now women pilots, engineers, police officers, scientists etc. We can mention here the name of Laxmi Lakra who by becoming an engine driver, showed the world that women can do everything.

Children especially boys are under great pressure. They are pressurised to think about getting a job that will pay a good salary.

It is a matter of great anxiety for the parents if their son shows his inclination towards studying subjects other than science or maths.

In our present social set-up parents have developed a false belief that only science and maths are meaningful subjects. Only these subjects can make their son's future secured. These notions have no base. They must be eliminated from our mind. Subjects like history, political science, etc. are also job oriented.

One positive change that is visible today is that more and more children have started going to school. In the past, the skill of reading and writing was known to only a few. Most children learnt the work their families or elders did.

But girls faced the even worse situation. In communities that taught sons to read and write, daughters were not allowed to learn the alphabet.

Slowly and steadily there came more and more positive changes. The communities that never learnt reading and writing started sending their children to school. In the beginning, there was a lot of opposition to educating girls. But there were also women and men who made efforts to open schools for girls.

Women struggled to learn to read and write. Here, the experience of Rashundari Devi (1800-1890) is worth mentioning. She was a housewife from a rich landlord's family. At that time, it was believed that if a woman learnt to read and write, she would become a widow. Despite this, she taught herself how to read and write in secret, after her marriage. She wrote her autobiography in Bangla which titled Amar Jaban,

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was another example who did a lot for women's education. She knew how to read and write Urdu, but she was stopped from learning Bangla and English. In those days only boys were taught English. However, she learnt to read and write Bangla and English. Afterwards, she became a writer and wrote a remarkable story titled Sultana's Dream in 1905. She did a lot to help other girls go to school and to build their own dreams. In 1910, she started a school for girls in Kolkata which is still functioning well.

No doubt more and more girls have started attending school, still they lag behind boys. As per the most recent census of 2001, 76% of boys and men are literate but the figure is comparatively very low in case of girls. Only 54% of girls and women are literate in India. Thus, the percentage of the male group is higher than the female group.

Girls who are from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds are less likely to remain in school. One of the many reasons is that several families are too poor and unable to bear the cost of educating all their children. Boys easily get preference in such circumstances.

The position and status of women have undoubtedly improved a lot which is due to the collective efforts of the women of the country. Women's Movement also gets the support of men. They used different strategies to spread awareness, fight discrimination and seek justice. For example, they organise campaigns to fight discrimination and violence against women. They also protest when violations against women take place. Women's Movement also shows solidarity with other women and causes.

Stereotype: the Fixed image of a person and a community. Stereotypes prevent us from looking at people as unique individuals.

Discrimination: Treating people unequally.

Violation: When someone forcefully breaks the law or a rule or openly shows disrespect, we often say that he/she has committed a violation.

Sexual Harassment: Physical or verbal behaviour that is of a sexual nature and against a woman's wishes.

Protest: To raise voice against the wrong action or decision.

Scheduled Caste (SC): It is the official term used for Dalit class of people.

Scheduled Tribe (ST): It is the official term used for Adivasi class of people.

Autobiography: Autobiography is the life sketch of the writer himself.

Manuscript: The script written in the writer's own handwriting.

Census: Census is held every 10 years. It counts the whole population of the country. It also gathers information about the people living in India—their age, schooling, what work they do, and so on.