

5 Women Change the World

Lesson at a Glance

- 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 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% boys and men are literate but the figure is comparatively very low in case of girls. Only 54% 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 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.

■ IN-TEXT QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

- Q. 1.** Fill in the table below. Add up the number of male and female images separately for each occupation. Now answer the questions that follow.

Category	Male image	Female image
Teacher		
Farmer		
Factory worker		
Nurse		
Scientist		
Pilot		

- (a) Are there more images of men than women?
 (b) In what kinds of jobs were there more images of men than women?
 (c) Have all the nurses been drawn as females? Why?
 (d) Are there fewer images of female farmers? If so, why?

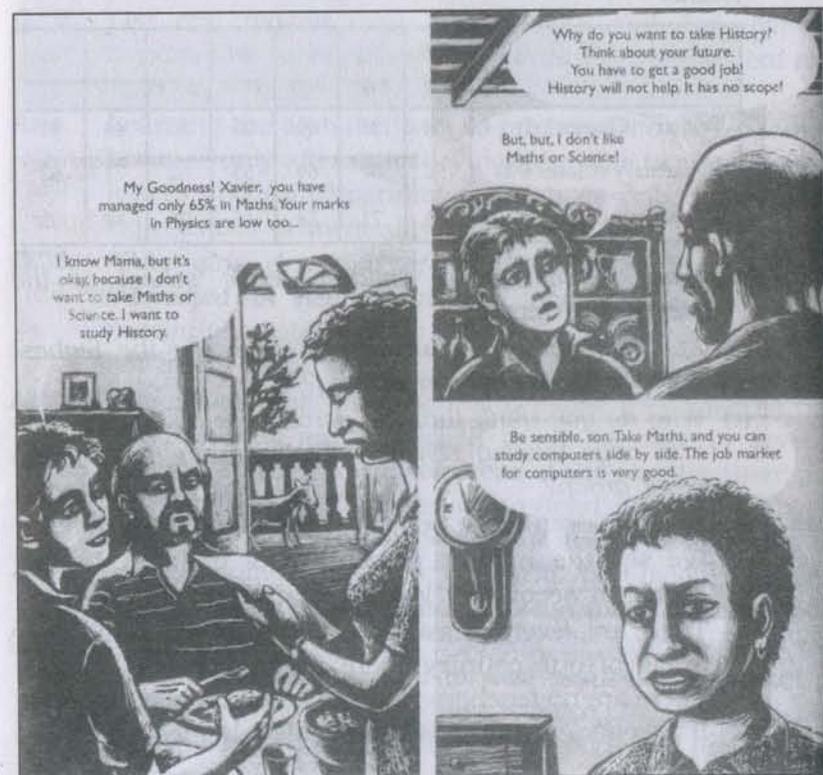
(NCERT Textbook, page 55)

Ans.

Category	Male image	Female image
Teacher	10	30
Farmer	38	02
Factory worker	30	10
Nurse	0	40
Scientist	35	05
Pilot	30	10
Truck driver	40	0
Domestic worker	05	35
Police officer	30	10
Soldier	40	0

- (a) Yes, there are more images of men than women.
 (b) Men are mostly employed as factory workers, scientists, pilots, truck drivers etc. Most farmers are also males. We rarely see a female farmer.
 (c) Yes, all the nurse have been drawn as females. The reason behind it is that females are more patient and gentle than men. They can look after the sick people with great care.
 (d) Yes, there are fewer images of female farmers. It is because farming is a very tough and strenuous job. It includes ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing etc. All these works are physically demanding. Women generally lack such stamina. Therefore, they do not involve themselves in farming. They only assist their male-partners. However, a few women can be seen nowadays in this field.

- Q. 2.** Read the story below and answer the questions.



- (a) If you were Xavier, what subject would you choose and why?
 (b) In your experience, what are some of the other pressures that boys experience?

(NCERT Textbook, page 58)

- Ans.** (a) If I were Xavier, I would choose History because it is the only subject that acknowledges us about the past.
 (b) Boys are often under a pressure. Their parents want them study only Maths, Science and Computer because they think that these are the subjects which can bring their sons good and high profile jobs. In such a condition if boys want to excel in subjects like History, Political Science etc. they face problems. Finally, they have to do what their parents want. Boys are often pressurised to think about getting a job that will pay a good salary.

- Q. 3.** Study the given table and answer the questions that follow.

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

- (a) What percentage of children leave school at the elementary level?
 (b) At which level of education do you see the highest percentage of children leaving?
 (c) Why do you think that the percentage of Adivasi girls and boys leaving school is higher than that of any other group?

(NCERT Textbook, page 62)

- Ans.** (a) 52% children leave school at the elementary level.
 (b) We see the highest percentage of children leaving school at secondary level.
 (c) There are several reasons behind it. In rural and poor areas of our country there are no proper schools. There are no teachers who can teach on regular basis. If a school is not close to people's homes and there

is no transport, parents do not show their willingness to send their girls to school. Many children also leave school because they are discriminated against by their teacher and classmates.

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

- Q. 1.** How do you think stereotypes, about what women can or cannot do, affect women's right to equality?

Ans. Women are considered inferior to men. There is a belief that women do not have technical mind and therefore they cannot be scientists. It is thought that women are good at only certain jobs such as teaching and nursing. These stereotypes about women's capability or incapability of doing certain jobs badly affect women's right to equality. It is due to this reason that women are not paid less wages than their male-counterparts.

- Q. 2.** List one reason why learning the alphabet was so important to women like Rashundari Devi, Ramabai and Rokeiya

Ans. Learning the alphabet was so important to these woman because only after that they became able to write stories, letters and autobiographies which described their own experiences of inequality.

- Q. 3.** "Poor girls drop out of school because they are not interested in getting an education". Re-read the last paragraph on page 62 and explain why this statement is not true.

Ans. Poor girls do not leave school because they wish so but because they are compelled to do so, due to several reasons. In rural and poor areas of the country there are no proper schools. There is also dearth of teachers who can teach on a regular basis. If a school is not close to people's homes, and there is no transport facility, parents do not show their willingness to send their girls to school.

- Q. 4.** Can you describe two methods of struggle that the women's movement used to raise issues? If you had to organise a struggle against stereotypes, about what women can or cannot do, what method would you employ

from the ones that you have read about? Why would you choose this particular method?

Ans. The women's movement used several methods of struggle in order to raise issues. Two out of them are:

(a) **Campaigning.** It is an important part of the women's movement. It fights discrimination and violence against women. Campaigns have also led to new laws being passed. For example, in 2006, a law was passed to give women, who are prey to domestic violence, some legal protection.

The women's movement also led the Supreme Court to formulate guidelines in 1997 to protect women against sexual harassment at the workplace. Women's groups also raised voice against dowry deaths. They demanded immediate justice for cases of young brides being murdered by their in-laws or husbands for more dowry. They did so by coming on to the streets, approaching the courts and by sharing information. As a result of their efforts, the dowry laws were changed to punish families who seek dowry.

(b) **Protesting.** The women's movement raises its voice when violations against women take place. Public rallies and demonstrations are a very powerful way of drawing attention to injustices.

If I had to organise a struggle against stereotypes, about what women can or cannot do, I would like to employ the method of raising awareness among public. What pressure cannot do, awareness can do effectively. If we skilfully convince people for something it works excellently. We can brainwash the common mass through street plays, songs and public meetings. It is a permanent solution to a problem.