



Women Change the World

- Women’s work in the home is not recognised as working. Doing household work and taking care of family members is a fulltime job and there are no specific hours at which it begins ends. Getting an education was, and still is, one way in which new opportunities were created for women.

- A teacher took the following data for 30 students.

Category	Male image	Female image
Teacher	5	25
Farmer	30	0
Factory worker	25	5
Nurse	0	30
Scientist	25	5
Pilot	27	3

Fewer opportunities and rigid expectations: A lot of the children in Rosie Ma’am’s class drew women as nurses and men as army officers. The reason they did this is because they feel that outside the home too, women are good at only certain jobs.

- For example, many people believe that women make better nurses because they are more patient and gentle. This is linked to women’s roles within the family. Similarly, it is believed that science requires a technical mind and girls and women are not capable of dealing with technical things. Because so many people believe in these stereotypes, many girls do not get the same support that boys do to study and train to become doctors and engineers. In most families, once girls finish school, they are encouraged by their families to see marriage as their main aim in life. It is important to understand that we live in a society in which all children face pressure from world around them. These come in the form of demand from adults. Boys are pressurized to think about getting a job that will pay a good salary and they are also tease if they don't behave like other boys.

Learning for change: Going to school is an extremely important part of our life. As more and more children enter school every year, they begin to think that it is normal for all children to go to school. 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. But 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.....

- For girls, the situation was worse. In communities that taught sons to read and write, daughters were not allowed to learn the alphabet. Even in families where skills like pottery, weaving and craft were taught, the contribution of daughters and women was only seen as supportive. For example the pottery trade, women collected the mud and prepared the earth for the pots. But since they did not operate the wheel, they were not seen as potters. The experience of Rashundari Devi (1800–1890), who was born in West Bengal, some 200 years ago. At the age of 60. She wrote her autobiography in Bangla. Her book titled 'AmarJiban' is the first known autobiography written by an Indian woman. Rashundari Devi 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 bring bad luck to her husband and become a widow! Despite this, she taught herself how to read and write in secret, well after her marriage. “I would start working at dawn, and I would still be at it until well beyond midnight. I had no rest in between. I was only fourteen years old at the time. I came to nurture a great longing: I would learn to read and I would read a religious manuscript. I was unlucky, in those days women were not educated. Later, I began to resent my own thoughts. What is wrong with me? Women do not read, how will I do it? Then I had a dream: I was reading the manuscript of 'Chaitanya Bhagabat' (the life of a saint). Later in the day, as I sat cooking in the kitchen, I heard my husband say to my eldest son: “Bepin, I have left my Chaitartya Bhagabat here. When I ask for it, bring it in.” He left the book there and went away. When the book had been taken inside, I secretly took out a



page and hid it carefully. It was a job hiding it, for nobody must find it in my hands. My eldest son was practising his alphabets at that time. I hid one of them as well. At times, I went over that, trying to match letters from that page with the letters that I remembered. I also tried to match the words with those that I would hear in the course of my days. With tremendous care and effort, and over a long period of time, I learnt how to read..." After learning the alphabet, Rashsundari Devi was able to read the Chaitanya Bhagabat. Through her own writing she also gave the world an opportunity to read about women's lives in those days.

Schooling and education today: Scheduled Caste (SC) is the official term for Dalit and Scheduled Tribe (ST) is the official term for Adivasi.

• SC and ST girls leave school at a rate that is higher than the category 'All Girls'. This means that girls who are from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds are less likely to remain in school. The 2001 census also found that Muslim girls are less likely, than Dalit and Adivasi girls, to complete primary school. While a Muslim girl is likely to stay in school for around three years, girls from other communities spend around four years in school. There are several reasons why children from Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim communities leave school. In many parts of the country, especially in rural and poor areas, there may not even be proper schools nor teachers who teach on a regular basis. If a school is not close to people's homes, and there is no transport like buses or vans, parents may not be willing to send their girls to school. Many families are too poor and unable to bear the cost of educating all their children. Boys may get preference in this situation. Many children also leave school because they are discriminated against by their teacher and classmates.

Women's movement: Women and girls now have the right to study and go to school. There are other spheres – like legal reform, violence and health – where the situation of women and girls has improved. These changes have not happened automatically. Women individually and collectively have struggled to bring about these changes. struggle is known as the Women's Movement. Individual women and women's organisations from different parts of the country are part of the movement.

Campaigning: Campaigns to fight discrimination and violence against women are an important part of the women's movement. Campaigns have also led to new laws being passed. A law was passed in 2006 to give women who face physical and mental violence within their homes, also called domestic violence, some legal protection. Similarly, efforts made by the women's movement led the supreme court to formulate guidelines in 1997 to protect women against sexual harassment at the workplace and within educational institutions.

Raising Awareness: An important part of the women's movements work is to raise public awareness on women's rights issues. Their message has been spread through street plays, songs and public meetings.

Protesting: The women's movement raises its voice when violations against women take place for example: when a law or policy acts against their interests. Public rallies and demonstrations are a very powerful way of drawing attention to injustices.

Showing Solidarity: The women's movement is also about showing solidarity with other women and causes.

