

Towards Gender Equality



Women in Telangana have been increasingly taking up jobs outside their homes. Today, more women participate in public life such as contesting elections and taking important decisions along with men. This has been due to their collective participation in various agitations and pro-active government policies, especially in 1980s and 1990s. Yet, women in Telangana are still far from reaching the goal of attaining equality and dignity in all spheres of life. For example, fewer young girls are able to survive than ever before. In this chapter, we will discuss some important issues associated with equality among men and women in Telangana.

- ♦ Do you know about women who go out to work in the fields, factories or offices? Find out about their daily work and the problems faced by them.
- ♦ Give a list of some jobs that men and women do separately.

Women are expected to do most of the household work like cleaning, cooking, washing, taking care of children etc. while men go out to work in the fields or factories, do shopping, etc. In many families, women who go out to work also have to do most of the household work. In some families, men come home drunk, beat up the women and children. The women are expected to tolerate all this silently.

Are women naturally like that?

Some people feel that women are naturally physically weaker than men. They are more caring, loving and not quarrelsome. They are, by instinct, tuned to cooking, cleaning, stitching and other household work. It is believed that they need to be protected by men. Women take care of children because they can only love and care. That is why women do all the household work because they are naturally suited to it. Do you also agree with this belief? Think of reasons for your answer.

- ♦ On the next page, a few statements about the nature of different people are given. Which are true for men only, which are true for women only and which are true for both men and women? Each student in the class should fill this table on their own.

S.No	Quality	Women	Men	Both
1.	Brave – aggressive, good in fighting			
2.	Rational – good in mathematics and science			
3.	Artistic – good in painting, dance and music			
4.	Studious – good in studies			
5.	Strong – good in doing heavy work			
6.	Weak – good for light work			
7.	Emotional – prone to crying and irrational anger			
8.	Shy – does not like to come out into the open			
9.	Talkative – always keep chattering			
10.	Reserved – talk very little and silent			
11.	Loving – Good at nursing the sick and caring for children			
12.	Tall and muscular – Good in sports			
13.	Likes dressing up			

- ♦ After the entire class has filled in the table, the teacher should put together the views of the majority of students on the black board.
- ♦ Now discuss each quality individually and examine the extent to which the majority of opinion is true – discuss with the help of examples.

If you go deep into each of these qualities, you will find that they apply equally to both men and women. For example, you will find both brave and cowardly men as well as women. You will find many men who are very caring and loving. But, we tend to attribute some qualities to men and some to women even though there is nothing in their physical make up which makes them so. The bodies of men and women are somewhat different biologically - because of which women can conceive babies and provide them with milk in the early months. This does not mean that only women can clean and bathe

the babies or wash clothes or prepare food for them. Men can also do these works. In many places, men do this kind of work very efficiently. But we have got so used to the idea of women performing some roles that we think are their natural qualities.

These qualities and roles are not natural in women but evolved over hundreds and thousands of years due to social norms. Since women have been performing these roles for many centuries, we have grown to regard them as natural. In reality, these roles have been made by society. For hundreds of years, we had been living in a social order which favours men and in which, men have

control over all the resources and the right to make rules. If you look at history, you will note that most rulers, most religious leaders and people who made laws and rules were men. They made rules in such a way that women were assigned a subordinate role to men and were controlled by them just like the land or cattle.

Thus, there are two kinds of differences between men and women. Firstly, there are natural physical differences, but these need not cause discrimination against women. The second kind of difference is made by our society which tries to subordinate women to men and treat them unequally. Differences which lead to such inequality and discrimination are called 'socially caused differences' or 'gender differences'.

Growing up as boys and girls

From their very birth, girls and boys are brought up according to many discriminatory ideas. Here are some statements about how boys and girls are treated - discuss them in the class and find out the extent to which they are true.

Why, in some families,

- ♦ while the birth of a boy is welcomed and celebrated in the house, the birth of a girl is considered a burden to the family.
- ♦ boys are encouraged to go out, make friends, play freely while girls are encouraged to be at home and do household work?
- ♦ boys are encouraged to play with toys like guns, cars and trucks while girls are encouraged to play 'house' with dolls and toys related to kitchen or household articles?

- ♦ boys get to wear dresses which allow them to run, climb, or go about freely while girls get to wear dresses which cover their entire body and obstruct their movement.
- ♦ boys are given food first while girls are given only what is left over.
- ♦ boys are encouraged to go to school and study while girls are neither sent to school nor given sufficient time to study.
- ♦ fewer girls than boys are allowed to study in higher classes.
- ♦ when boys fall ill, they get early medical treatment while girls do not get proper medical attention when they are sick.
- ♦ various careers for the boys are planned while girls are told that they have to get married and settle as housewives.

Fewer girls, fewer women

All this discrimination has very sad consequences. For example, we find that the proportion of females in Indian population is constantly decreasing. In 1951, there were 946 females for every thousand males. In 1981, it declined to 934 per thousand males. After that, it rose to 940 females per thousand males by 2011.

Let us look at the situation in Telangana. In 1991, there were 969 females to thousand males. The situation has improved and in 2011, there were 988 females to thousand males. This places Telangana among the best states in the country with regard to sex ratio. However, among children under six years, we see that the

number of girls per thousand boys is rapidly declining. You can see this from the following table:

Year	Boys	Girls
1991	1000	978
2001	1000	963
2011	1000	933

This means that actually the situation is not improving, but deteriorating.

Normally, equal number of girls and boys should take birth. If the proportion of girls is less, it means that girls and women are not able to live a healthy life in our country and are dying earlier than men. But why is this proportion constantly declining?

This may be due to many reasons. In some families, young girls do not get sufficient nutritious food and are not able to survive when they suffer from diseases. Girl children in India also face discrimination - they do not receive proper medical treatment. In recent times, the proportion of girls has reduced also due to female foeticide, a social practice where girl children are killed before they are born. This also means that technological advancement gives people the choice of giving birth to only male children.

- ♦ Find out from your teachers and parents about these practices in your area and prepare a report for your class wall newspaper.

Differences in Literacy Levels

Going to school and learning to read and write are important things in life for all of us.

Look at the Fig. 16.1 Two differently coloured bars in the figure show the proportion of literates in Telangana – the number of males and females aged 7 years and above who can read and write in Telugu or any other language. There are more male literates compared to females in Telangana. You will notice that for every 100 females in Telangana, the number of female literates in 1991 was only 28. This has increased to 58 in 2011. The proportion of male literates has increased from 52 to 75 during this period. You will also notice that the gap between the males and females is declining.

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have one of the largest educational systems in India with nearly 1.50 crore students studying in more than one lakh schools and colleges. Children dropping out of school is also an important problem. Thirty years ago, this problem was acute particularly among girls. For example, if 100 girl children started going to school, more than 65 of them discontinued their schooling after class 5; in fact, not more than 15 girls were able to pursue intermediate education.

Another aspect of discrimination is low literacy levels among women. Girls are not encouraged to go to school and are made

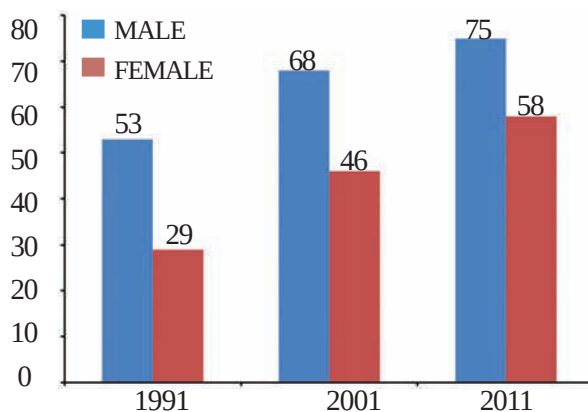


Fig. 16.1: Literacy Level in Telangana (%)

to stay at home to do the household work or work in fields and shops. Even the girls who go to school have little time to study at home, as they have to do a lot of household work after school time. Even when girls manage to go to school and study, they are discouraged from taking subjects like mathematics and science, which are considered more suitable for boys. Girls are told that they can only learn subjects like literature and 'home science'. In fact, many institutions practice gender bias by not allowing boys to opt for subjects like 'home science' and forcing girls alone to opt for them.

Now, the situation has improved. Yet one-sixth of children stop going to school after class 5. There are no major differences one could find between girls and boys in this regard.

- ♦ If you study in a co-ed school, can you make a list of things which you feel are discriminatory.
- ♦ Each one in the class can talk to 2 persons (both men and women) who have attended school only for a few years to find out the reasons why they stopped. Discuss all the reasons in the class.
- ♦ Are there any girls in your locality or village who stopped coming to school during last year? Find out the reasons and discuss them in class.

Right to property

In India, most resources like land and factories are in the name of men. Even though the law provides that property of

parents should be divided equally between all children (both sons and daughters), in actual practice, very few girls get a share in their parents' property which is usually passed on only to sons. As a result, women have little or no control over any productive resources like land, shop or factory. They, therefore, have to be economically dependent upon their fathers, husbands, sons or brothers.

The situation in Telangana, in recent times, is relatively better. This is due to the laws made in the state in 1980s, which made it mandatory that the ancestral property of parents should be equally divided between sons and daughters. In fact, our state was the first state in the country to make such property laws to reduce discrimination.

Employment

Women going out of the house and taking up jobs are able to become self dependent. Most women workers in Telangana are employed in agriculture, doing casual jobs, and a small section of them run their own shops, farms and other enterprises. Thus, when women take up employment, they need not depend on others.

We have also seen that girls in some families are brought up in such a way that they are undernourished and under-educated. Therefore, they have less opportunity to gain proper employment and get good salaries. Even women who are well educated are not allowed by their families to take up professional jobs that require them to be away from their homes for long time. They are allowed only to take up part time or less demanding jobs. Most of the women who are without proper educational

qualifications are forced to do physical labour in the fields or mines or as domestic servants in houses of rich people. These jobs are back breaking and exhausting. Moreover, the women doing them are often looked down and they lose respect and security. They have to face insults and abuses all the time.

Read what Malini, a woman domestic worker in the capital of our country, Delhi, has to say:

“My first job was with a rich family that lived in a three storeyed house. The lady would shout to get any work done. My work is in the kitchen. There are two other girls for cleaning. Our work begins at 5 o’ clock in the morning. We get a cup of tea and two stale rotis for breakfast – never even a third roti. In the evening, when I cook food the two cleaning girls would beg me to give them an extra roti. I would secretly give them the rotis and also make myself some. I used to feel scared of the lady but also felt angry and humiliated . Did we not work all day? Don’t we deserve to be treated with some respect”?

- ♦ If you know about such people, discuss how they are treated, their problems and their earnings.
- ♦ Why do you think people like Malini earn less than a hundred rupees a day even though they work hard for several hours?
- ♦ What are the other professions that are commonly taken up by women? Discuss them in the class.

In the last few decades, the employment scene for women has been changing gradually. Many women have acquired degrees and are entering into jobs which were earlier considered as male professions. The reservation policies pursued from 1980s in Telangana for admission to women in all colleges and in government jobs have led to more and more girls joining colleges and taking up salaried jobs. Some leading scientists, mathematicians, diplomats, engineers, etc.

are women. Women are now also recruited into the police, army, navy and air force and there are many women pilots today. In fact, we have women who are train engine drivers. This has been possible because women have fought to get higher education and have broken gender biases in many professions.

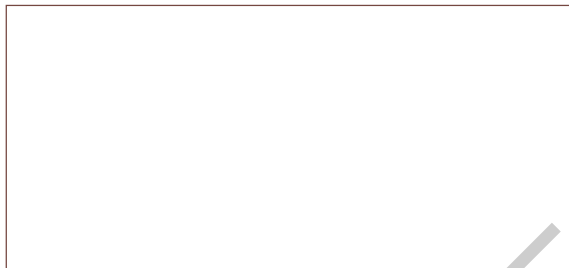


Fig. 16.2: First woman Loco driver in India- Surekha Yadav

Unrecognised work of women

If we look at the daily routine of any woman, we will realise that they are working all the time. But for most of the time, the work they do is not recognised and not paid for. Even though everyone can see them working hard, their work remains invisible.

- ♦ Draw a figure of farmers working in the field in the blank space given below? After drawing it show it to the teacher.



- ♦ How many of you drew a picture of a man working in the field and how many showed a woman farmer? How many showed both men and women working in the field?

You can see that when we say farmers, we only think of men but never of women. In fact, nearly eight out of every ten Indian working women work in the fields. They till the land, they do the seeding, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and countless jobs. Of course, it is also true that many farm jobs are 'reserved' for women – like transplanting rice, weeding or plucking groundnut pods. Women do these and many other jobs also in agriculture. A large number of farms are fully managed by women farmers alone as the men go out in search of work in factories and towns.



Fig. 16.3:
Look at this picture. A woman even if employed, has to do all these tasks. Yet do we count household work as labour?

Many women are working on their family farms, yet their work is not recognised. Women who work on other people's farms get wages which are lower than what men get.

If you study the work done by women within your own house, you will realise the hard work that goes into running the house. Just imagine if women were to charge for the work they do at home (for cleaning, cooking, making pickles, taking care of children, teaching children, nursing the sick, stitching clothes, fetching water, purchasing provisions etc.) how much would they get paid every month?

The reality is that they do not get paid for any of this work, and instead they are constantly abused for not doing this work on time or not to the taste of the others. On the other hand, most of the work that men do is paid for and they control the money and spend it as they wish.

- ♦ List all the work that your mothers, sisters or sisters-in-law do in the house? When do they get up, when do they eat, when do they rest and sleep?

Things are changing now

You might have studied in chapters 13 and 14 about the functioning of a village

Panchayat and an urban self-government body in Telangana. Being a member in such organisation would help in taking important decisions to improve the conditions of the village, community or the place in which we live. Although females, including young girls, are half of the population, hardly few women take active interest are allowed by their families or husbands to become member or leader of such political bodies. Due to government initiatives which made it mandatory to involve women in Panchayati Raj bodies, more and more women are now coming forward to participate in public affairs - contesting Panchayat and other elections.

Recall how Indra in Lesson 8, the dry chilly seller runs her shop, taking loans

from a self-help group. Women forming self-help groups at village and mandal levels help them to generate resources for the family. Many of them are also able to take important decisions along with their husbands or other male members within the family. The self-help groups also provide space to discuss important issues and problems associated with the community or village and help women to participate in political bodies. Even though they face much resistance, women have been taking these new roles successfully.

Keywords

Employment Literacy
Property Rights Sex Ratio

Improve your learning

1. Is it correct to say that girls are naturally weaker than boys are? Give reasons.
2. List the household jobs you, your brother or sister do?
3. Make a list of ten employed women you know of personally. Get information about their work and earnings.
4. If you have any elder women in the family who went to school some twenty years ago, find out their experience of schooling and compare it with that of your own times.
5. Why do you think daughters are not given equal share of the property of the parents?
6. Go to some Self-Help Groups in your area and find out how they help women to gain independence and dignity.
7. Read the second para of page 135 (Some people feel that suited to it) and write the answer. Is it proper to say that women are weaker than men? Write your opinion.



Project:

1. Find out from your school records how many girls are enrolled in class 1, 5, 8 and 10. Does it support the view that more boys complete schooling than girls do?
2. Find out from popular magazines about women who have entered professions which were earlier considered only for men. Prepare an album of their lives and struggles.
3. Consult parents in your village/locality and collect information about dropouts from schools.

Sl. No.	Name of the Student	Category	Drop out in which class	Reasons for dropouts
		SC/ST/BC/OC/ Minority		

Which category students are more in drop outs? What are the reasons? Analyse and discuss in the classroom.