CHAPTER – 1
CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Status of women has been an important area of sociological studies. It has been studied by sociologists from various perspectives. The most striking feature is that it centers around their subordinate position which has acquired an institutional character. In sociological studies sociologists have studied the nature of inequality and its institutional basis. The prevailing view within sociology during 1960s was that caste, class and power were being used as the basis of stratification. Gender or rather ‘sex’, did, however, not receive much attention.

Parkin (1972) argued that ‘sex’ could not be regarded as an ‘important’ dimension of stratification, since the disabilities attaching to female status did not override those of class. The analysis of class was based almost entirely on studies of men’s location within the class structure. Feminists have made it clear that class is not the only significant form of stratification. Hence it is necessary to consider how women and men are differentially placed in the class system. Betteille (1969, 2000) inspired by Weber and Marx has considered ‘Caste, Class and Power’ as the basis of stratification in agrarian society. Gender however, has not been considered a basis of social stratification. Acker (1973) addressed the absence of women in stratification studies and explained it in terms of the major assumptions in stratification literature about the social position of women. She suggested that feminist reconceptualization of stratification studies would lead to a better understanding of social structure. A number of criticisms of the content and methods of the discipline were put forth (Oakley, 1972; Smith 1978; Stanley and Wise, 1983). Even when women were included in the research, they were often presented in a sexist manner. Sex and gender were seldom seen as explanatory variables. The explanatory theoretical paradigms often naturalized women’s subordination on biological grounds (Millet, 1974).

When we examine Indian society with reference to caste and class we find that women belonging to lower caste and high caste have had differential status in social,
economic and political field. The existing inequalities and imbalances have resulted in differences in the impact of the various forces of change on different groups of women. So, it becomes relevant to study the nature of women’s inequality in social economic and political domain.

The present study proposes to examine the status of dalit and non-dalit women in a comparative manner. We have selected three aspects related to women’s status i.e. social, economic and political. The different variables related to these three aspects were selected for intensive study in Haryana. Sex ratio, education, health, violence against women, work participation rate, role of women in decision making and empowerment through reservation have been identified for detailed study.

CONCEPT OF STATUS:

It is generally considered that status refers to a position in social system. Since each status position in a particular structure can be viewed in terms of superiority and inferiority, the notion of status involves comparison and grading. As defined in the report of National Committee on the status of women in India (1974), status refers to a position in a social system or sub system which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other positions through its designated rights and obligations (Vohra and Sen, 1985).

Linton (1936) explained two forms of status i.e. ascribed and achieved. Ascribed status is usually fixed by birth. On rare occasions, however, ascribed statuses can be changed. Ascribed statuses include gender, age and aristocratic titles. The traditional Indian caste system recognised its member’s status in ascriptive terms. Achieved statuses are the one where a persons’ merit and achievements based on work not birth determines his or her position. It recognises ability and talent of a person. In western society an individual’s occupational status is determined on the basis of achieved criteria.

Each status position is expressed in terms of role. A role represents the dynamic aspects of a status. Each status in society is accompanied by a number of norms which define how an individual occupying a particular position is expected to act. This group of norms is known as role. There are no roles without statuses or statuses without role. According to Merton (1968), “Each social status involves not a
single social role but a whole area of such roles”. Max Weber (1958) explained the social order as a composition of status. Maclver (1962) is of the opinion that for an individual the status determines the extent of respect, prestige and influence in society.

Patriarchal societies continue to fix rigid gender roles and prescribe behavioural norms that are often discriminatory against women. No society in the world provides women equal status with men. Although anthropologists have found that women are given considerable social recognition. It is generally believed that there exists no society in which their publicly recognised power exceeds that of men (Zollinger and Smock, 1977). After reviewing women’s studies in a number of societies, Rosaldo and Lampherr (1974: 3) conclude that everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than the role of men. It seems fair to say then, that all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated. Although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life. It is the gender based differences that have often been highlighted for differential status of women. Needless to add that women are biologically different from men. Betteille (1977) argues that the nature presents us only with differences or potential differences. With human being these differences do not become inequalities unless and until they are selected, marked out, and evaluated by processes that are cultural and not natural. In other words, differences become inequalities only with the application of socially constructed cultural milieu and historical conditions. What is true of biological difference is even truer of gender differences. Therefore, it is pertinent to point out distinction between sex and gender.

**CONCEPT OF GENDER AND SEX**

The terms ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender’ are usually used as synonyms. The feminists and sociologists have tried to bring out a distinction between these two. ‘Sex’ in precise terms is considered a biological category whereas ‘Gender’ is a socio-cultural category.
One of the first to elaborate this distinction was the British sociologist Oakley (1972) who borrowed the terminology of sex and gender from Stoller (1968), a US psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. He defined sex as the anatomical and psychological characteristics which signify ‘biological maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ and gender as ‘socially constructed masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. ‘Masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are products not of biology but of the social, cultural and psychological attributes acquired through the process of becoming a man or woman in particular society at a particular time. Gender is thus a social characteristic, not a direct product of biological sex. There has been a remarkable shift in sociologists and social scientist’s focus on women studies as they are more concerned about analysing the gender basis of inequality.

Gender denotes a hierarchical division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices. Gender is thus a social structural phenomenon but it is also produced, negotiated and sustained at the level of every day interaction (Jackson and Scott; 2002: 1). In a book that has had an important influence on feminist thought, Simone de Beauvoir’s Le Deuxième Sexe (The second sex) (1949) famous assertion that ‘one is not born a woman: one becomes one’s’ encapsulates an argument that women’s inferior position is not a ‘natural’ or biological fact but one that is created by society. One may be born as a ‘female’ of the human race but it is civilization which creates ‘women’, which defines what is ‘feminine’, and prescribes how women should and do behave. And what is important is that this social construction ‘women’ has meant a continued oppression of women. The social roles and modes of behaviour that civilization has assigned to women have kept them in an inferior position to that of men.

Millet (1970), argues that in a society without culturally defined gender roles, each individual will be free to develop an entire-rather than a partial, limited and conformist-personality. Thus females may develop so called male traits, and vice versa. This would involve complete tolerance of homosexual and lesbian relationships, ‘so that the sex act ceases to be arbitrarily polarized into male and female.’ Thus, those who are biologically male and female may develop their
personality and behaviour along lives best suited to themselves, rather than being cramped and confined by the culturally defined labels, male and female.

**A SOCIOLOGICAL FOCUS ON GENDER**

Sociology's Lexicon in the early 1970s recognised gender as the key concept. While there has been work on 'sex role' prior to the 1970s, this was marginal to sociology core concerns. Sociologists have studied social stratification on the basis of caste, class, power and status. Gender was never analysed. Here we will discuss the concept of gender inequality in sociological writings in which sociologists thought about relations between men and women prior to the 1970s.

The sociologists of 19th and early 20th century paid little attention to issues of gender and sexuality, despite the fact that the social transformations which preoccupied them entailed major shifts in family life in relation between men and women and in conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity (Seidman, 1997). Of the major nineteenth century, thinkers, it was Marx who had the greatest impact on feminist work, although he himself had little to say about women and inequality. Marx was concerned exclusively with class. He explained in detail the nature of exploitation of the proletariat (the working class) by the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) in industrial society. Although these classes were theoretically asexual, in fact Marx treated both workers and capitalist men (without considering their gender as in any way significant). The way in which Marx took women's domestic work for granted is evident, for example, in his discussion of the reproduction of labour power in the first volume of capital (Jackson and Scott, 2002:03). While Marx only occasionally acknowledged women's existence, his collaborator, Engles, had rather more to say about the position of women in society. Both Marx and Engles influenced later discussion of women and the family (Zaretsky, 1976). In the 1970s many Marxist feminists tried to bring gender into Marxism by focussing on the way in which women's domestic labour contributed to the reproduction of labour power and thus to the maintenance of capitalism (Kaluwynska, 1980; Rushton, 1979). Others followed Engles in discussing the 'relations of reproduction' through which women were subordinated within families (e.g. McDonough and Harrison, 1978). While
these later writings made women more visible with Marxism, they did not really confront the problem of women's inequality.

**Engels (1884)** discussed the position of women in his work ‘The Origins of the family, Private Property and the State’. He starts from the assumption that at some time in history women and men were equal if not different. He assumed that in historic times the contribution of men and women towards the social group had been equally valued. He argued that the world’s historic defeat of the female sex’ came about with the development of private property, which led men to seek control over women's sexual and reproductive capacity in order to pass their worldly goods on to their own offspring. This led to the overthrow of 'mother right' in favour of 'father right,' to monogamous marriage and the subordination of women within the family. Thus, **Engles** saw female subordination as a result of the emergence of private property, in particular the private ownership of the force of production. Male monogamous marriage which involved the economic dependence of the wife upon her husband provided this control. Hence **Engles** questioned the universality of women's subordination, but nonetheless assumed that gender divisions were entirely natural (Jackson and Scott, 2002: 4).

Like Marx and Engles, **Weber** did not question the basic division between men and women. **Weber**'s contribution to the study of women's position in the society is the concept of patriarchy. For **Weber** patriarchal authority was the oldest form of socially legitimated power. **Weber**'s work has had a limited impact on modem approaches to gender. Only a few modern feminists like **Hamilton (1978)** have developed an explicitly Weberian analysis of patriarchy. **Weber** had in mind those societies where kinship is the fundamental organising principle (Barrett, 1980). Some sociologists have brought a gender dimension to Weberian analyses of class, focussing on the ways in which women and men are differentially distributed within the occupational hierarchy (Britten and Heath 1983; Roberts 1993; Witz, 1990). However, more traditional Weberians, still resist the incorporation of gender into class analysis (Goldthorpe, 1983; 1984).

Of the three main 'founding fathers':**1** **Durkheim (1964)** is the least appealing to modem feminists largely because of his view of society as a neatly integrated
functioning whole in which everyone had their place and women's place was in the home. **Durkheim** argued that the division of labour became more elaborated as societies progressed. At the same time men's and women's roles became increasingly specialized and the differences between them more marked: among cultivated people, women lead a completely different existence from that of men. **Durkheim** came closest to recognising the social subordination of women by showing that married women were more likely to commit suicide than either married men or single woman. He concluded that men benefitted more from marriage than women. He believed, for example, that monogamous marriage restrained men's sexuality, providing security, tranquillity and mental calmness. Women did not need this calming influence, because their sexual life, he thought, was less intellectual and more tied to biological imperatives. He also recognised that the double standard of morality imposed monogamy more powerfully on women than on men. Therefore, **Durkheim** took gender into account as a variable, he simply reported what he saw effect of an inevitable 'civilised' division of labour superimposed upon an assumed 'natural' biological difference (Jackson and Scott: 2002: 5).

**Feminist Discourse on Women’s Status**

Feminists study women’s inferior position and the associated discrimination encountered by them because of their sex in society. Furthermore, one could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. Beyond these general assertions, however, it is difficult to come up with any other ‘common ground’ between the different strands of feminism, and as Delmar (1986) argues, one cannot assume that agreement or feminist unity underlies the extreme fragmentation of contemporary feminism. Indeed, such an assumption of unlooked-for effect of marginalizing different groups of women whose concerns fall outside this definition of feminist unity.²

Feminist movements at different moments are distributed as a series of ‘waves’. ‘First wave’ of feminism refers to the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century feminist movements that were concerned (although not exclusively) with gaining equal rights for women, particularly the right of suffrage. ‘Second-wave’
of feminism refers to the resurgence of feminist activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, when protest again centred around women’s inequality, although this time not only in terms of women’s lack of equal political rights but in the areas of family, sexuality and work. This classification is a useful historical summary, but may lead to the false impression that outside these two ‘waves’ there has been no feminist activity. Certainly, there was less activity that could be called feminist before the suffrage movements at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century; the question of women’s social position had been a topic of thought and action well before the word ‘feminist’ evolved. And between the suffrage movement and the reinvigoration of feminism in late 1960s and 1970s, the issue of women’s inequality did not just die away and feminism did not lie dormant, although feminists may have been less visible and their voices heard less during this period.

Grouping feminist movements under a general description of ‘first wave’ and ‘second wave’ might act as a mask for the diversity of feminist thought that has existed both within a whole series of different theories and actions. There is thus, for example a tendency to reduce first wave feminism to the struggle for suffrage, even though there was a wide divergence of feminist views on women’s political rights at the time. Although it may be true that feminist movements were more active and recruited more members at certain historical periods, it would perhaps be more accurate to see feminism not as emerging in ‘waves’ but as a continuum of thought and action.

Feminisms and ideas related to feminists may be divided into three loose groups: liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, and radical feminism. Liberal feminists include all those who campaign for equal rights for women within the framework of the liberal state, arguing that the theoretical basis on which this state is built is sound but that the rights and privileges it confers must be extended to women to give them equal citizenship with men; Marxist and socialist feminists link gender inequality and women’s oppression to the capitalist system of production and the division of labour consistent with this system; and radical feminists see men’s domination of women as the result of the system of patriarchy, which is independent of all other social structures – that is, it is not a product of capitalism. Variations may
be introduced depending on how far these classifications consider Marxist and socialist feminism as closely related or separate groupings, or by the introduction of a group of ‘dual –systems’ feminists, who combine elements of Marxist and radical feminist thinking.

More recent surveys have also added on the categories of psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, black feminism, and so on. These classifications are undoubtedly useful in providing an intelligible understanding of the positioning of major feminist theorists in relation to each other, and the lucid analysis of feminist theories and movements provided by writers such as Jaggar (1983), Tong (1992) or Walby (1990), among others. As with all attempts at classification, however, there seems to be a tendency inherent in this approach to gloss over differences and to prioritize elements of commonality in the various categories of feminisms. Moreover, labels such as liberal, socialist or radical feminist, although adopted by some feminists to describe themselves and their theoretical and practical positions, do not justify the complexity of feminisms, which is perhaps more aptly described by Nye (1989:1) as a ‘tangled and forbidding web’. This focus on issues and debates may be seen as a more fruitful way of addressing the fragmentation and multiplicity of contemporary feminist debate and of moving beyond a simple oppositional positioning of different strands of feminist thought (Hirsch and Fox Keller, 1990).

Thus it can be concluded that despite many divergences and conflicts within these feminisms, they all have an important and worthwhile goal which is highly relevant to contemporary society, despite some claim that we have now entered an era of ‘post-feminism’. As Segal (1999:232) concludes in answer to the question “why feminism”? ‘Because its most radical goal, both personal and collective, has yet to be realized: A world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women’ and, she adds on, that world would be better not just for women, but for men as well. The post-modernists thought in contemporary times have further pointed out the conditioning of human thought based on sexuality (Foucault, 1979).
DALIT AND NON-DALIT WOMEN

In order to understand gender discrimination in the Indian context, it is essential to understand caste discrimination. There are striking parallels between the cultural logics of caste and gender discrimination (Kapadia, 1995). Like women, the ‘untouchable’ castes are defined as intrinsically ‘impure’ and inferior human beings. They are portrayed as being so far apart from the other castes that they are outside the caste-system altogether. Structurally, therefore, they are ‘casteless’. This is why the scheduled castes are not counted as being part of the caste system at all – they do not form part of any of the four ‘varnas’ as major groupings of castes. According to caste ideology, they are totally excluded a radical social exclusion that appears to be given vivid physical and spatial embodiment by the fact that they, traditionally, were forced to live in separate villages, at some distance from the ‘main’ villages of the ‘caste-Hindus’ whom they served. Even more than women have been completely excluded from Hinduism’s most highly valued symbolic domains.

However, ideology is one thing, reality is quite another. Despite the many exclusions enacted against ‘untouchable’ people, in both symbolic and real way, the scheduled castes have in fact, always been intimately connected with the higher castes who despised them. This is most starkly brought home by the fact, that they are dalits who constitute the core of the agricultural labour force in most parts of India (Habib, 1983; Kumar, 1992; Yanagisawa, 1996). Thus, on the one hand, the dalits have been scorned and reviled as virtually ‘less than human’, as ‘impure’ and uncivilized, on the other hand, no caste – Hindu village would have been able to function without them. The argument advanced was that if the castes had been forced to perform these ‘polluting’ tasks themselves, they would have lost their caste rank, due to becoming ‘polluted’ (Kapadia, 2002). In a remarkably similar manner, women are despised in the classical Brahminic law books ascribed to ‘Manu’, where they are characterized as impure, lustful, uncontrolled, inferior beings (Leslie, 1991). But no household could survive without the enormous labour put in by women, into housekeeping childcare and productive work of all kinds. Yet this unceasing female labour remains hidden, socially invisible, unappreciated – and unpaid. This is not even to consider women’s roles a child bearers, without whom no ‘male lineage’ could ever exist.
According to Kapadia (2002) there are suggestive parallels between the working of these ideologies and the ideology of slavery. The parallels are very close. First, all three subjects – women, ‘untouchables’ and slaves – are reviled by dominant discourses as virtually less than human, being ‘human’ is clearly identified with being a higher status male. Second, their ‘innate’ – and therefore unchangeable – inferiority means that they cannot ever be trusted with freedom or autonomy. They must instead always be controlled and subordinated. Third the work that these inferior subjects do, partakes of their own nature, so that any work they do becomes inferior work, valueless and invisible of negative value, ‘polluting’ work. Thus women’s household labourers are not only invisible and unappreciated, but constitute demeaning work that a self respecting man must never do. Dalits do what they were born to do, which is to serve ‘higher castes’; while slaves very similarly, live to toil. Fourth, there is far more than a subtle connection between the ideology of slavery, on the one hand and these ideological constructions of femaleness and untouchability on the other. In fact the connection is profound. ‘Upper caste’ males- those who create these discourses – related to both women and dalits as creatures of a lesser worth who owe them service. Fifth – all this means that such work does not need to be paid at a normal rate because this work is not evaluated at its economic price. Dalits have received only nominal pay for their ‘customary’ duties, no matter how onerous, time consuming or unpleasant these might be, while women, like slaves, have received no recompense at all, because, again like slaves, they have no right to own property. The widely shared view that men own the bodies and the labour of women is paralleled by the view that higher castes are born with the right to command the lowest castes and to command their labour. This is linked to the salient fact that historically, in much of India, ‘Untouchables’ were agrarian slaves (Habib, 1983; Kumar, 1992’ Yanagisawa 1996).

Above analysis reveals that women have always been treated as secondary citizen irrespective of caste she belongs to. But, with this, this is also a fact that dalit women are thrice subjugated to discrimination: (a) as women, (b) as dalit women, and (c) as dalit women who do stigmatized work. Within dalit women we have different strata; those who are dalit but do not do polluting work and have different status as
compared to those who do work that is considered polluting. In Haryana Balmikis do scavenging work that is considered polluting. In comparison to Balmikis, Chamar and Dhanak are not considered to be engaged in polluting work. These women are often landless labourers; they usually have no education and are restricted to the most poorly paid jobs in agriculture. The stigma of their being engaged in polluting work makes them economically vulnerable and forces them to lead a life which makes them suffer from multiple disadvantages in social field. Dalit women face discrimination in access to a dignified life, to legal redress to claim what is their in principle, to equal wages, to the decision making process, and to benefits from government initiated programmes targeted at their welfare. Issues of childcare and health are relegated to the background in a struggle for subsistence. The problem of being marginalized and therefore, discriminated against is worsened by the practice of untouchability. However, they have far more personal autonomy and much greater physical mobility than do women from better off, higher castes even in the same villages (Kapadia, 2002). In the present study, we intend to analyze the status of dalit and non-dalit women in a comparative manner within India in general and Haryana in particular.

**CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment was the buzzword of the nineties. However, there is little consensus on definition and use of the term. Empowerment is about social transformation, it is about radical social transformation, and it is about the ordinary people, common people, rather than politicians, experts and other socially or culturally advantaged persons.

It is an active, multi-dimensions process which should enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist a greater access to knowledge and resource, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, have greater control cover the circumstances that influences their lives and free them from shackles of serfdom imposed on them by customs, belief and practice. Generally, development with justice is expected to generate the forces that lead to empowerment of various sections of population in a country and to raise their status. Although, the concept of power contained in it is generally left unspecified. Empowerment is both a means to an end and an end in itself. The idea of
Empowerment may be invoked in virtually any context: in speaking about human rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill formation or the conditions of a dignified social existence. Empowerment is also invoked in the context of economic weakness and insecurity, particularly of marginalized unorganized and other disadvantaged groups, classes and categories (Beteille, 2000: 268). According to Agarwal empowerment is a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged (powerless) individual and group of challenge and change existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, social and political position (Agarwal 1994: 22). Thus it can be said that the empowerment is about power and the distribution of power is not a separate or detachable part of society but permeates every type of arrangement in it.

The UN Millennium Development Goals suggests that having an equal voice in the decisions that affect their lives from within the family to the loftiest realms of government – is a key element of women empowerment. Women empowerment can be defined as a condition in which women hold or are in the process of obtaining educational, legal and political rights that are equivalent or nearly equal to those of male citizens. The United Nations defined women empowerment by including, “women’s sense of self worth, their right to have and determine choices; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside home and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally.”

UN Population Information Network define women empowerment as “Women empowerment has five components : Women’s sense of self-worth, their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order, nationally and internationally.”

National Policy of Empowerment, 2001 clearly illustrates its objectives:

(a) To bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women.

(b) To eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.
(c) To ensure active participation of women in all spheres of life.

Themes and issues concerned in policy:

(a) Judicial Legal system
(b) Economic empowerment
(c) Social empowerment including health, education, violence, science and technology, drinking water and sanitation.
(d) Women and decision-making, media and girl child etc.

Women empowerment is now widely employed in the press, on television and in political, academic and even legal circles. The 73rd amendment in constitution is a step forward to empower the women by giving 33 per cent reservation to them in Panchayati Raj institution in local administration to strengthen their positions in local governance. All state governments amended their Panchayati Raj Acts in accordance with the constitutional amendments. While the hopes raised through the amendments are high, the real picture at the grass root level is different and mixed. In the traditional Indian society, politics is still regarded as ‘unwomanly’ and the traditional attitude also prevent them from participating in politics, even at the grassroots level in panchayati raj institutions. In order to assess the impact of these constitutional provisions and the legal and administrative measures, the present study proposes to inquire whether these measures have strengthened and empowered, the dalit and non-dalit women in Haryana.

WOMEN STUDIES IN INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

A search for the ‘origins’ of the visible women in Indian sociology would lead to argue otherwise. Wadia’s ‘Ethics of Feminism’ (1923) is probably one of the first attempts in sociology in India to explore the effects of feminist thought on marriage, motherhood, home life, education and professions. Hate’s (1946) thesis on ‘Hindu Women’ and Dube’s (1963) review of ‘The roles of men and women in India’; were written during this pre-institutionalisation phase of sociology. Both these works are often quoted by sociologists working on women related themes prior to the establishment of women’s studied as a formal area of enquiry.

Karve’s explorations into issues related to marriage, family motherhood using legends and folk songs, her essays, novels and short stories need deliberations. Her
paper, ‘The Indian Women in 1975’ (Karve, 1966), which was a projection of future patterns of life for Indian women, was based on an analysis of Census Data. She points to ‘special areas of education’ for women and comments on the greater proportion of women than men in sociology. Not only she notes the adverse sex ratio and the regional and cultural differences therein but also clearly projects that increased educational and employment facilities will not mean more choice in marital matters for women. There are critical observations about the bulk of employment for women coming from agriculture and their decreasing numbers in textile mills.

Srinivas (1978) constructs a patriarchal model of rural society and considers the position of women in different social strata. He discusses in detail the division of labour between men and women across different strata in the agricultural economy. He notes the invisible economic activities of women of the rich landed castes, the participation in family owned-farms by wives of the middle and marginal peasants, and wage work by women in the landless lower strata of the agricultural hierarchy. He shows that caste and class overlap and gender is another dimension that affects the division of labour. In addition Srinivas discusses the social dimension of women’s status, its link to the family’s economic and caste position and the contribution of the new factors of change. For example, working for wages, work on a family farm and withdrawal from direct economic activity or from manual labour from a hierarchy corresponding to the social status of different caste. Lowie (1920) stresses the need to distinguish between law and fact, between theory and practice and finally, between formal and informal relations. This set of distinctions is basic approach of Srinivas to the understanding of the position of women in different sections of India society.

The study by Epstein (1973), Mencher (1986), Ramaswamy (1983) and Desai (1987) deals with women’s work. While Epstein and Ramaswamy have located their discussion within the frame work of development, Mencher focuses on status of female cultivators in Tamil Nadu.

Epstein’s explanatory framework is based on the cultural roots of women’s oppression and of their secondary status in agricultural work. Mencher also highlights this dimension of women’s work. Culture, on the other hand, is the starting point in Epstein’s paper. Desai focuses on the familial role of educated employed women. Blumberg (1975) suggests seven types of ‘Life options’ that affect the
freedom and measure the relative status of women and men in all known societies. According to her, life options include deciding whether and whom to marry, deciding to terminate a union, controlling one’s sexual freedom, pre and extra-maritally controlling one’s freedom of movement, having access to educational opportunities, de facto share of household power and controlling reproduction and completed family size to the extent that is biologically possible.

Studies on women marked an increase after the publication of the Report of the Committee on ‘Status of Women in India’ (1974). The World Plan of Action (1975) for the Decade for women gave priority to research activities in all aspects concerning the situation of women.

Thus, it can be said that the work on women’s studies were very marginal before 1970s. The studies which had been done to evaluate the women’s status are based on their social, economic and political position in society. (Like: Wadia, 1923; Hate, 1948; 1966, Mukherjee, 1977; 1986; Srinivas, 1978 etc.). The present study is also based on these three aspects of women’s status i.e. social, economic and political. In these three domains of women’s status we try to analyse how women’s position is subordinate to men. For analysing this, the concept of status has been examined in three domains. First part deals with social aspect, second with economic and the third is related to political dimensions of women within India in general and Haryana in particular. The next chapter is related to analysis of previous studies which were conducted on dalit and non-dalit women’s status.

Needless to mention that an objective study of status of women cannot be gauged without having a proper assessment of concepts in relation to gender, sex and theoretical perspectives associated with it. Keeping this in mind, the focus of the present study is to examine the conceptual and theoretical issues that highlight the social, economic and political dimensions related to it. Needless to mention that the conventional focus of study on social stratification did not include gender as a category to examine the element of discrimination that women suffer in India. Therefore, in the succeeding chapter, we propose to discuss and review the literature available on the conceptual and theoretical implications of the studies conducted on this broad theme of status of women.
NOTES

1. **August Comte, Emile Durkheim** and **Max Weber** are considered the classical sociological thinkers.

2. If it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to define feminism in terms of a set of core concepts. Feminism may be defined better or further in terms of its historical origins and development? The term feminism is a relatively modern one – there are debates over when and where it was first used, but the term ‘feminist’ seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients, who were perceived as suffering from ‘feminization’ of their bodies (Fraisse, 1995). The term was then picked up by Alexander Dumas Fils, a French writer, republican and antifeminist, who used it in a pamphlet published in 1872 entitled *I’ home-femme*, on the subject of adultery, to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine way. Thus, as Fraisse (1995:316) points out, although in medical terminology feminism was used to signify a feminization of men, in political terms it was first used to describe a virilisation of women. This type of gender confusion was something that was clearly feared in the nineteenth century, and it can be argued that it is still present in a modified form in today’s societies where feminists are sometimes perceived as challenging natural differences between men and women.

Feminism is thus a term that emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding an amelioration in their social position. Even after the word feminism was coined, it was still not adopted as a term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women’s rights. Even many of the women’s rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not call themselves feminist: the term feminism had a restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups (Delmar 1986). It is only more recently that the label feminist has been applied to all women’s rights groups indiscriminately, and this non-coincidence between these groups’ self-identification and subsequent labelling as feminist clearly relates to the
problem of what criteria are to be used in deciding whether a person, group or action is ‘feminist’. Should all theories, actions and campaigns that improve women’s social position, whether intentionally or not, be classified as feminist? Or must there be a conscious intent to undertake a ‘feminist’ activity? If the first position is adopted, then it can be argued that the meaning of feminism becomes almost impossibly diffuse. Similarly, there is query over whether different types of women’s political organizing which do not have as a specific goal the furtherance of women’s rights – for example, women’s peace movements – should be called feminist. Again a positive answer may lead to a diffusion of the meaning of feminist beyond the bounds of what is theoretically or politically helpful. On the other hand, there are those who argue for a much tighter definition of feminism, and as Delmar (1986:13) points out: there are those who claim that feminist does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminist. This means that it should be possible to separate out feminism and feminists from the multiplicity of those concerned with women’s issues. It is by no means absurd to suggest that one does not have to be a feminist to support women’s rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women’s demands are feminists. In this light feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminists can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field (and this even if skepticism is still needed in the face of claims or demands for unified feminism), but cannot claim women as its domain.

3. The Dalits are the scheduled castes, previously known as the untouchable castes’. The term denote the social groups who have historically suffered (and continue to suffer) the sharpest forms of social discrimination in the caste system, arguably a discrimination and a social segregation that have been more brutal than South Africa’s apartheid system. This historical discrimination has included their dispossession of land, which they were not allowed to own due to their status as agrestic slaves (Habib, 1983, Kumar, 1965).
4. To secure equal rights to women, key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration (1995) as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome Document adopted by UNGA session on Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st century, titled “Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action” have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow-up. The policy also takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Five Year Plan and sectoral policies five-year plans and sectoral policies relating to empowerment of women.