

CHAPTER XVI

GENDER JUSTICE

It is estimated that the textile industry provides direct employment to above 35 million people. If we include those working in the allied industries and in marginal capacities then the figure rises to 93 million people. While gender-wise statistics are not available, except through the odd sample survey or census, it is seen that livelihood for women workers is provided mainly by the decentralized Handloom, Handicrafts, and Sericulture industries, where their numbers are estimated to be over 50%. Within these segments, there are more women in the household industry than in the registered, small scale or cottage units, working for themselves rather than for wages. Within the registered units, there are more women in the unskilled and lower paid jobs than in the skilled or trained category.

In the organized sector, the percentage of women workers is extremely low. If they are visible in significant numbers it is mainly in clerical positions in offices attached to the industry.

Based on this distribution of women, the strategy attempts to provide gender justice and empowerment in the following manner

In accordance with the guidelines of the National Commission for Women, Committees have been set up in this Ministry and offices/organizations of this Ministry to deal with complaints relating to the sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The presence of senior women in these committees as chairperson or members has been mandated, and detailed

guidelines on handling such work with firmness and tact have been issued. Emphasis is being laid on sensitizing department staff on gender dimensions.

In the unorganized sector, where women are more at threat of exploitation and feel powerless to deal with the environment, the strategy comprises emphasizing the productive role of women and their greater amenability to discipline and hard work. Action is also being taken to up-grade skills through the provision of training facilities.

The project for the establishment of a Sericulture Complex for Women commenced in February 2004 for a period of 5 years. Under the programme, women sericultuists are imparted training for skill development in the areas of integrated nutrient and disease management of the host plant, silkworm rearing, quality silkworm seed production, etc.

The Handloom sector has taken up a massive programme to train 1 lakh weavers. The aim is to upgrade weaving and design skills and impart information that will enhance their skills in accessing raw material and markets.

Stimulating the formation of women groups and learning from the experience with Self-Help groups, and projects such as the 'Mahila Samakhya', an endeavor has been made to organize women so that they can improve their capacity through solidarity and through mutual help to access facilities that would be denied to them as individuals. In the sericulture sector Self-Help Groups,