



Lesson 8

Chandraprabha Saikiani

Do you know what rules society had for women a hundred years ago?

Work with a friend. List at least five rules women in the early 20th century had to follow, that modern women do not need to.

What will you do if you are asked to speak with boys from behind a bamboo screen?

Now read this story about a passionate Assamese woman who tried to remove the taboos faced by herself and other women of her days.

Chandraprabha Saikiani was a renowned social reformer from Assam who fought to make formal education available for girls. These happened during a time when society did not allow girls to step out of home. Born on 16 March 1901 to Ratiram Mazumdar and Gangapriya, Chandraprabha spent her early years in Doisingari village in Kamrup district. She and her sister Rajaniprabha were so eager to study that they did not mind wading through mud to attend a school which only had boys and was situated several kilometers away. This was the beginning of a journey of a lifetime to rid society of all the taboos against women that prevailed during those days.



Chandraprabha Saikiani realised that girls had to fight a hard battle to receive an education as good as that received by boys. So after school, she would gather other girls and teach them what she had learnt during the day.

Chandraprabha's efforts greatly impressed school sub inspector Nilkanta Barua, and she and her sister were awarded a scholarship to study in Nagaon Mission



School. Chandraprabha made the best of her school education. On several occasions she fought for the rights of girls. In those days girls weren't admitted into the hostel unless they converted to Christianity. Chandraprabha vehemently opposed this and the school authorities were compelled to allow girls of all religions to avail the hostel facilities.

In 1925, Chandraprabha challenged the prevailing custom of women sitting behind a bamboo screen in public meetings. In the Assam Sahitya Sabha session held that year at Nagaon, she delivered a very powerful speech and demanded the removal of the bamboo screen that was placed between men and women. She was staunchly against such restrictions and her protest against these norms of society was not confined to this incident alone. The next year, at her initiative, the first women's organisation, "*Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti*" was formed.

Chandraprabha Saikiani was greatly affected by the deep rooted caste system in India. In her own state, Assam, she took matters into her own hands. One of such radical steps was to fight for the entry of every one, irrespective of caste, gender and class, into the famous Hayagriva Madhava temple at Hajo.

In 1921, when Chandraprabha met Mahatma Gandhi, she was inspired to join the freedom movement. She spread the message of khadi, boycott of foreign clothes, removal of untouchability, banning of opium and other social evils. From 1930 onwards she immersed herself in the freedom movement. She was imprisoned thrice, in 1931, 1942 and in 1943. Nothing could dampen her indomitable patriotic spirit. Whenever she saw any injustice, her rebellious spirit rose to the occasion.

This great freedom fighter spread the message of her mission also through a number of books. The Padma Shri was conferred upon her a few days after her death in 1972. Apart from this great honour, she was also remembered with a commemorative postal stamp in 2002.

ACTIVITIES

1. Answer the following questions from the lesson to check your comprehension:

- Who was Chandraprabha Saikiani?
- What did Chandraprabha do to educate the girls of her village?
- Which two incidents show us how Chandraprabha fought for the rights of girls?
- On what occasion did Chandraprabha Saikiani inspire women to come out from behind the bamboo screen?
- What steps did Chandraprabha take to eliminate the caste system?
- What was Chandraprabha Saikiani's role in the dailyassam.com movement of India?

2. Work in pairs and complete the following sentences with information from the lesson:

- At a time when society did not allow young girls to step out of home, she fought _____.
- In those days girls' schools did not exist, so Chandraprabha _____.
- Chandraprabha and her sister were awarded _____.
- In order to eliminate the evils of the caste system, Chandraprabha fought for the entry of _____.
- Being inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Chandraprabha _____.

3. Read the following sentences and find a word from the text to replace the underlined part.

- (a) Chandraprabha Saikiani was a famous and respected social worker from Assam.
- (b) She tried to get rid of all the cultural or religious restrictions against women that prevailed during those days.
- (c) Chandraprabha refused to accept and questioned the prevailing custom of women sitting behind bamboo screens in public meetings.
- (d) She was strong in her attitude against society's restriction and her protest against the norms of society was not confined to a particular incident.
- (e) Whenever she saw any injustice, her desire to resist authority rose to the occasion.

4. Listen to your teacher read out the first paragraph of the lesson. As you listen, complete the table below with information about Chandraprabha Saikiani:

Chandraprabha Saikiani	A _____ social reformer from A _____
Birth	_____ March _____
Father	_____
Mother	_____
Sister	_____
School	A school which only had _____

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5. There are seven paragraphs in the lesson Chandraprabha Saikiani. Choose the appropriate description for each paragraph.

(a) The first paragraph is about:

- (i) Chandraprabha Saikiani's childhood
- (ii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's birth as the social reformer
- (iii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's career as a school teacher

(b) The second paragraph is about:

- (i) Chandraprabha Saikiani's preparation to be a school teacher
- (ii) Girl's education vs boy's education
- (iii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's efforts to get an education just like the boys of her village

(c) The third paragraph is about:

- (i) her fight for freedom
- (ii) her fight for the rights of girls
- (iii) her fight against British rule

(d) The fourth paragraph is about:

- (i) formation of *Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti*
- (ii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's protest against restrictions imposed on women
- (iii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's speech at the Assam Sahitya Sabha meeting

(e) The fifth paragraph is about:

- (i) the caste system of India
- (ii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's visit to Hajo
- (iii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's protest against the caste system

(f) The sixth paragraph is about:

- (i) Chandraprabha Saikiani's meeting with Mahatma Gandhi
- (ii) Chandraprabha Saikiani as the freedom fighter
- (iii) the punishment Chandraprabha Saikiani received for being a freedom fighter

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(g) **The seventh paragraph is about:**

- (i) Chandraprabha Saikiani's rebellious spirit
- (ii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's imprisonment
- (iii) Chandraprabha Saikiani's motivation to join the freedom movement

6. **Discuss in groups and share what you have learnt about:**

- (a) The condition of women during the days of Chandraprabha Saikiani
- (b) Chandraprabha Saikiani's role in the freedom movement

Your group leader will read your points aloud for the rest of the class.

7. **Let's learn some grammar:**

In this lesson you have come across verbs that use 'to' before them-

- (a) She was inspired to join in the freedom movement.

The form "to join" is a non-finite verb generally known as the **to-infinitive**.

The to-infinitive can also be used as the subject of a sentence as in-

- (b) To keep the guests waiting is not good.

It can also be used as the complement of a sentence-

- (c) It is not good to keep the guest waiting.

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Now practise using the to-infinitive.

Combine these sentences by using to-infinitives. The first one is done for you-

- (a) I will visit the book fair. I will buy a few novels.

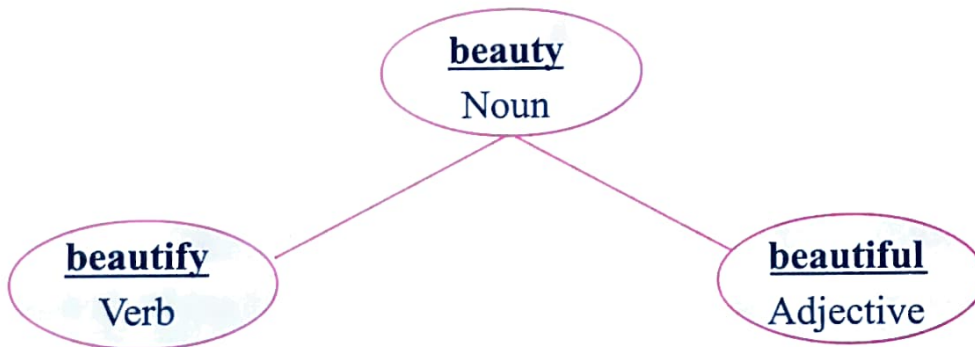
I will visit the book fair to buy a few novels.

- (b) We are going to Puri tomorrow. We will visit the Jagannath Temple there.

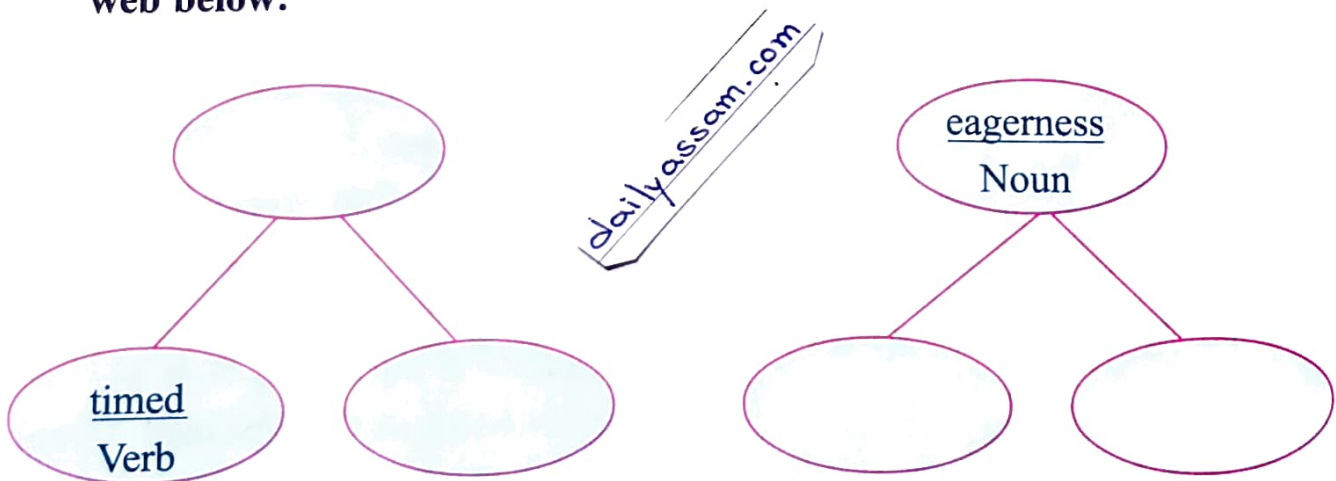


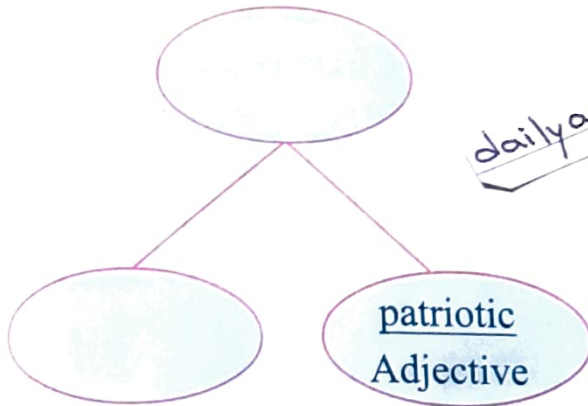
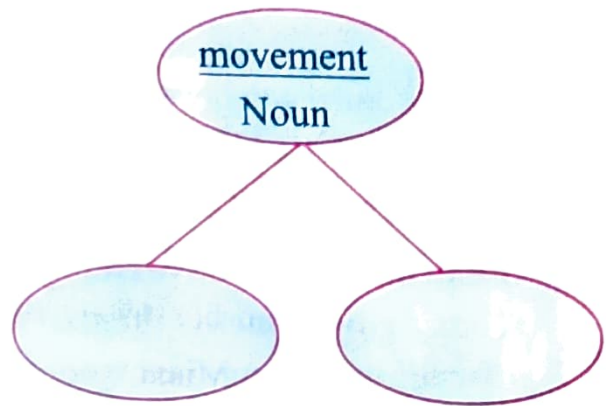
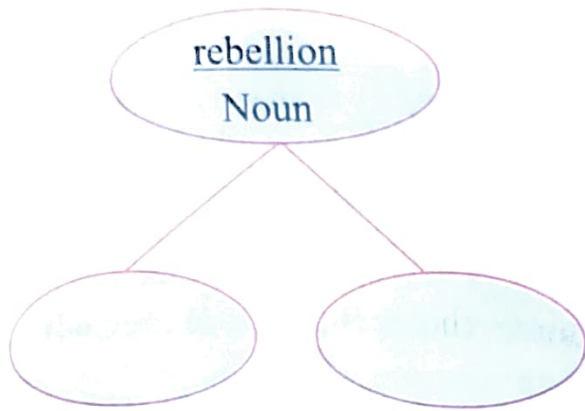
- (c) She started a small school for girls. She would help them to overcome the taboos against women.
- (d) She delivered a very powerful speech. She demanded the removal of the prevailing customs of women sitting behind bamboo screens.
- (e) She and her sister were awarded a scholarship. They will study in Nagaon Mission School.

8. You must have come across English words which have different forms. One word can be used to form several other words, and such words usually go to a different word class. For example, look at the following word web where you will see different forms of the word beauty.

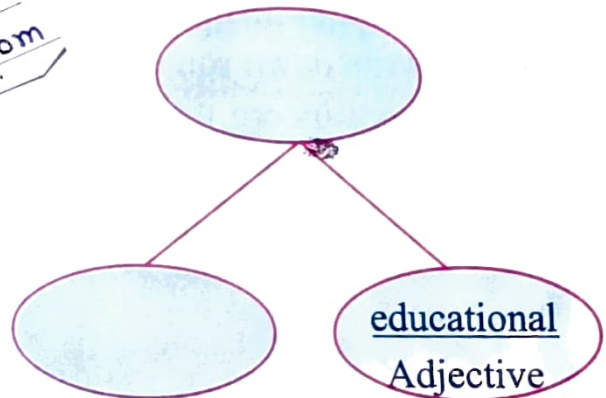


Now complete the word webs with other forms of the words given in each web below:





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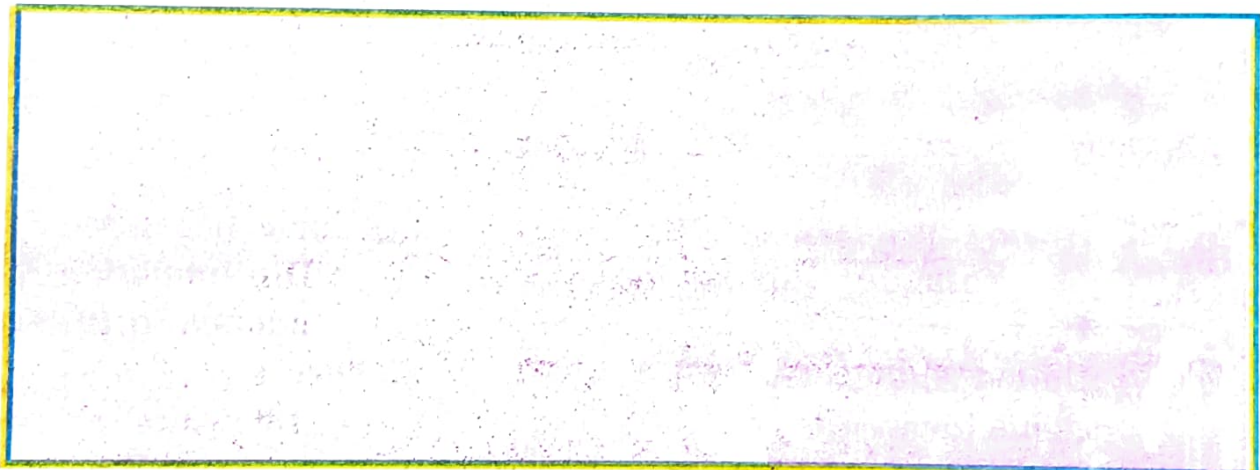


9. (a) Have you heard of CEDAW? The full form of CEDAW is the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. CEDAW is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Described as an internal bill of rights for women, CEDAW was ratified by 189 countries. Some of the important features of CEDAW are:
- Governments shall take concrete steps to eliminate discrimination against women.
 - Governments shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that women can enjoy basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.
 - Governments shall take appropriate measures to eliminate sexist stereotypes.
 - Women will have the right of vote, to participate in forming and implementing governmental policies.

- Women will have the right to represent the country at an international level.
- Women and girls should receive career and vocational guidance and have access to education opportunities at par with men or boys.

Look how things have changed since the days of Chandrababha Saikiani! Today governments themselves have undertaken the task of eliminating discrimination against women. But the government alone cannot succeed in this task unless women become aware of their rights.

- Work in small groups to find out more about CEDAW on the internet and write down some more important features of CEDAW. (You can search www.un.org.)
- Based on your reading, prepare a poster on the topic - 'Let's stop discrimination against women'.



(b) Now that you have learnt about Chandrababha Saikiani and the norms of society women had to follow, choose any one of the topics below and write a short essay. You can work in small groups.

- Chandrababha Saikiani as a social reformer
- The different challenges that women faced during the time of Chandrababha Saikiani
- Chandrababha Saikiani fought a hard battle for herself and her younger sister in order to receive an education as good as the one the boys in her village were receiving.



- (c) Think of yourself in the place of Chandraprabha Saikiani and list some ideas to eradicate taboos against women that are still present in our society today.

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10. Your teacher will divide the class into five groups (A, B, C, D and E) and assign paragraphs to each group.

Group A - Paragraph 2, Group B - Paragraph 3, Group C - Paragraph 4, Group D - Paragraph 5. Working in groups:

- (a) Look up the dictionary to find out the meaning of the word 'skit'.
- (b) Read the given paragraph very carefully. Using the information provided in it, write out dialogues to make a skit. Develop the characters and also try to design the backdrop. Then act out the skit in front of the class.
- (c) Prepare a slogan on the issue highlighted in the paragraph. Write the slogans on chart paper and hang them around the class. Here is a sample slogan.

Happy Women, Healthy Women!
Stop Female Foeticide!