



## GENDER SENSITIZATION AND EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT:

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. This concept is also useful in analyzing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes. Gender sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities, and incorporate these into strategies and actions. Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. On the contrary, education that is gender sensitive benefits members of both sexes. It helps them determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. Gender awareness requires not only intellectual understanding and effort but also sensitivity and open-mindedness to change one's views and limited perspectives and values. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for both women and men and builds their capacities to be more wholesome and humane. In this regard, teachers are strategically positioned to act as agents of change in order to achieve gender equality, especially through what they teach, how they teach and how they role model their own attitudes, beliefs and practices in the classroom and beyond. Indeed, teachers do not come into classrooms as gender-neutral persons. They are likely to have internalized a patriarchal gender ideology through their upbringing and years of socialization in both formal and informal settings. The influence of teachers and educators on gender roles of their students immensely impacts their educational outcomes as well as their roles in contemporary society.

### KEYWORDS:

**GENDER, SENSITIZATION, EQUALITY, EDUCATION.**

### INTRODUCTION:

Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. On the contrary, education that is gender sensitive benefits members of both sexes. It helps them determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. Gender awareness requires not only intellectual understanding and effort but also sensitivity and open-mindedness to change one's views and limited perspectives and values. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for both women and men and builds their capacities to be more wholesome and humane. The concern for gender in and through education, especially in classroom spaces, is critical because of the negative and far-reaching implications that gender disparities and inequities (reflected through biases, stereotypes and discriminatory practices) have for educational institutions. Education is a major force that will help trigger change but this will occur only when teachers and learners are assisted in adopting classroom initiatives that reflect new images based on a positive gender equity ideology. Gender equality as a strategy has great potential to create desired change because it has the capacity to address both the practical and strategic needs of boys and girls, of nations and the world at large. In this regard, teachers are strategically positioned to act as agents of change in order to achieve gender equality, especially through what they teach, how they teach and

How they role model their own attitudes, beliefs and practices in the classroom and beyond. Indeed, teachers do not come into classrooms as gender-neutral persons. They are likely to have internalized a patriarchal gender ideology through their upbringing and years of socialization in both formal and informal settings. Teachers' patriarchal word views impact on the hidden curriculum that is often as influential in classroom as the official curriculum. Frequently it is the hidden curriculum which ensures that gender differentiated practices, procedures and processes occur in classroom spaces and school structures where gender-friendly policies and curricula already exist.

### KEY ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Even after the 67 years of independence, women education has not achieved the desired results despite of many inputs to promote and facilitate the process of sharing knowledge at distance level whose reasons are:

- An ample section of Indian society does not give prominence to girl education of their restricted mindset, conservative norms and poor mentality.
- Guardians do not take interest in making a girl child literate due to their undeveloped level of

mentality towards education.

- Girls are not allowed to make up decisions for them and step out from their homes because of social discrimination and male-dominated society.
- Girls are not sent to schools because of social immoralities, child-marriages and dowry and veil customs.
- Some girls are not able to make up for schools as they contribute in agriculture and house chores, so they don't get admitted in schools.
- A middle class man is not able to afford education as it is getting costlier day by day. Despite of numerous facilities provided by the government, he prefers boy education rather than the girl education.
- Most of the India's population reside at rural regions. The guardians are not interested in sending their girl child to school because of shortage of basic installations such as non-availability of hygienic water, no arrangement for separate sanitary facility for girls in schools.
- Parents are hesitated in sending their girl child to co-education institutions and geographical distance from their home or village also plays a significant role in making them deprived of education.
- Curriculum which is being taught in the schools is theoretical and defective. It emphasis on theoretical knowledge instead of practical knowledge. Parents and girl child also does not get aspired from education because of its non-employment orientation.
- Girls give away education because of earthbound teaching methods and begin participating in household tasks. As a result, they get married soon and because of marital responsibilities, their dream of being literate is not fulfilled.

### **NEED FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION:**

Gender sensitization is first instance, tends to change the perception that men and women have of each other. It creates a mindset in men that no longer sees in women the stereotypical image. The impression that women are a weak and unequal entity no more clouds the minds of common man. Rather they are seen as responsible and equal partners in socio-economic development. The general perception of men and women on the rigid gender division of labour and other orthodox practices related to gender begin to die down. Women also tend to develop the perception that they are no subordinate to men and they have an equally important role to play in decision making at household, community and organization level.

The main problem of Indian society is lack of women recognition and appreciation for women's involvement in multifarious activities. The men, who are reluctant to acknowledge women's contribution, come forward under

the influence of sensitization to recognize their contribution. The gender sensitization process develops understanding that women do possess wisdom and therefore they must be involved in decision making process. They have concerns and therefore should be treated with dignity and equal chance in sharing of social and economic benefits. Women cutting across, socio-economic boundaries tend to see their problems in larger perspectives of women development and come forward to recognize the efforts of fellow women. They even visualize the important role that men can play in their socio-economic development. Such an orientation marks the beginning of a definite realignment in gender relations. Social image of women improves and their concern are shared by men.

### **GENDER SENSITIZATION STRATEGY:**

Forms and intensity of gender bias varies greatly according to the socio-cultural and economic contexts. Therefore in order to bring desired change in people and in the society, we need to develop a well thought out gender sensitization strategy considering the prevailing socio-cultural economic and psychological situation of target group. The strategy basically involves three components selecting the target audience, deciding the content and deciding the methodology. Since the content and methodology of the program are decided according to the target group before designing the sensitization program.

### **PEDAGOGIC STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GENDER SENSITIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION:**

#### **1. PARTICIPTION**

Most feminist educators understand that knowledge is not neutral, that teacher and students alike bring 'texts' of their own to the classroom which shape the transaction within it. Feminist pedagogy emphasizes participatory learning and teaching, within which subjectivity, emotions and experience have a definite and valued place. While participation is a powerful strategy, its pedagogic edge is blunted when it is ritualized. Participation, when seen as an instrument to achieve certain specified, predetermined objectives and where the teacher's own ideas dominate classroom discussion is not meaningful, It involves appreciation of importance of starting from experience of both students and teachers.

#### **2. RECOGNISING DIFFERENCE**

Implicit in any effort at facilitating real participation is to work with the principle of recognizing difference. As children share reflect on their individual and collective experiences they simultaneously acknowledge and relate these to the experiences of others who may not form a part of their social reality. It is important that this difference not be marked by status but by diversity. Pedagogies that provide space for individual children to express themselves freely in the classroom, without fear of judgment and stereotyping are essential building blocks in working towards a future where they can have more

critical engagements with what is being taught in the middle and higher classes.

### 3. READING AGAINST THE GRAIN

However it is possible and also necessary to be able to equip students to “real against the grain”, to critically question received knowledge, whether it is biased text book or other literary sources in their own environment. Undoubtedly this is an objective that education would aspire for in the higher school. Yet there is need to build in approaches that encourage learners to comment compare and think about elements that exist in their own environment. Women educators have used songs as a powerful medium for discussion, comment and analysis in culture that are primarily oral. As repositories of knowledge exist in different medium, all these forms whether television, advertisements, songs, paintings etc. need to be brought in to create a dynamic interaction between learners themselves. Lateral learning processes necessitate new equations between the teacher and the student.

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGING POWER

A gender sensitive pedagogy is one that does not merely affirm different individual and collective experiences but it located these with in larger structures of power. Question such as who is allowed to speak for whom? Whose knowledge is most valued? Inform engagements with learners. A Bachelor of Elementary Education teacher reflected on her course that the ‘gender and schooling’ paper has made her conscious of these realities. She said that she may not able to change everything but she will try and make difference where she can within the classroom. This translates into evolving different strategies for different learners. For e.g. encouraging a child to speak in class may be important for some children and learning to listen to others may be of priority for others.

### 5. THE TEACHER AS A FACILITATOR

The teacher’s role is to provide a safe space for children to express themselves and simultaneously to build in certain forms of interaction. While consolidating and constructively pushing the limits of learner’s understanding, s/he needs to be conscious of how differences are expressed. An atmosphere of trust would make the classroom a safe space where children can share experiences, where conflict can be acknowledged and constructively questioned, where resolutions, however tentative, can be mutually worked out. A space where they can practice democratic ways of interacting with each other and build skills to negotiate with conflicts outside the school. For girls in particular, school and classrooms should be spaces to discuss processes of decision making, to interrogate the basis of their decisions and to make informed choices. The construction of the female as passive may act against her within participatory teaching and learning contexts. In our schools where gender based construction underpin ideas of classroom discipline and strict divisions are maintained between girls and boys, a girl who is interactive is likely to be pulled up

for transgressing the ‘gender code’. Clearly, there needs to be a rethinking of the agency of the learner in the classroom context. This reconceptualization has to become an organic part of the ways we think of education today and find a prominent role in teacher training programs.

### CONCLUSION:

Education is the most effectual instrument to improve the status of women in any culture. If she is educated, she can educate the whole family. An educated woman helps the family to get rid of poverty making participation in income-generating activities. Low level of literacy not only has a negative impact on women’s lives but also on their families and nation’s social and economic development. At equal intervals of time, women education in India has been in the news and brought up to a qualitative form associated with committees as per the updates but poor implementations have lately made it restricted to official papers. Indian Government provides incentives for girls to get education in terms of free books and uniforms, low fee structure and mid day meals. Though, women education made a remarkable progress in the nation till date, but there is a strong need to restructure and making collective efforts, strong official actions, proper implementations and social initiatives programs with public-private partnership to strengthen the women education. We hope, we will achieve the target soon because a series of efforts are still going on.

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