

Our Schools should be the workshop for Gender Sensitization

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ABSTRACT

The socialization of gender is reinforced at school,“ Because classrooms are microcosms of society showing its strengths and hills alike, it follows that the normal socialisation patterns of young children that often lead to distorted perceptions of gender roles are reflected in the classrooms, Yet gender bias in education reaches beyond socialization patterns, bias is embedded in textbooks, lessons and teacher interactions with students. This type of gender bias is part of the hidden curriculum of lessons taught implicitly to students through the everyday functioning of their classroom.

The awareness of gender within our schools assures that girls are made aware that they are unequal to boys. Every time students are seated or lined up by gender, teachers are affirming that girls and boys should be treated differently. When an administrator ignores an act of sexual harassment, he or she is allowing the degradation of girls. When different behaviours are tolerated for boys than for girls because ‘boys will be boy’ schools are perpetuating the oppression of females. There is some evidence that girls are becoming more academically successful than boys, however examination of the classroom shows that girls and boys continue to be socialised in ways that work against gender equity.

Teachers enlighten girls towards a feminine ideal. Girls are praised for being neat, quiet and calm, whereas boys are encouraged to think independently, be active and speak up. Girls are socialised in schools to recognize popularity as being important and learn that educational performance and ability are not as important. “Girls in grades six and seven rate being popular and well liked as more important than being perceived as competent or independent. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to rank independence and competence as more important.

Parents attitude towards gender sensitivity on discrimination among school students, while teachers attitude and that of government were not significant in contributing to cases of gender sensitivity among students. Recommendations were also made. This paper will be significant to teachers, counsellors and the general public in sensitizing parents on issues regarding gender sensitivity so as to guide them on fair and equal treatment among their children or wards in order to curb discrimination among secondary school students.

INTRODUCTION

Is it the same India where women are worshipped as goddesses? In our culture the figure of Ardhnarishwara or half man and half woman is revered and worshipped. The Ardhnarishwara, in a way is a symbol of equality of the sexes, of the fact that both sexes are equally significant and none is less than the other. This is our culture that treats both sexes as

equals. However, we, who take pride in our rich heritage and in the culture of revering womanhood, are slipping into the morass of depravity. All doesn't seem well in man's paradise.

In view of the increasing role of women in public life and the efforts of the government in the direction of universalisation of education, the question of gender sensitization has assumed greater importance. Most Schools have become co-educational these days where boys and girls interact with students and teachers of the opposite sex. The physical proximity of the girls and boys has made interaction free and unrestrained. Reports of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexually objectionable behaviour are quite common in Indian educational institutions. Numerous reasons can be forwarded behind such behaviour. We have to see the larger picture if we want to address this issue. Gender discrimination cannot be treated in isolation as it has its roots in deeper problems, which plague our society.

The Indian society is still in the process of modernisation where sections of the population continue to have traditional mindsets. The traditional Indian thinking considers males as superior to females and there are plenty of examples to show that young girls are discriminated against at home. Statistical evidence shows that boys in India have three times greater possibility of being taken to the hospital in case of a serious ailment. In many poor Indian houses males are fed first and the left over are eaten by the females. The dropout rate in Schools is much higher in case of girls. The scenario is even more grim in rural India where parents prefer to send the boy child to school and keep the girl child at home to assist in household work or to work in any other income-generating activity. This discrimination at home weakens the personality of women in general and they look upon themselves as inferior to men right from childhood. At the same time, boys are made to believe that they are inherently superior to females. Most boys and girls attend schools loaded with this mental baggage. The indoctrination received at home compounded by the already existing social differentiation between males and females give rise to attitudes in the male folk, which are far from egalitarian. Though our constitution clearly proclaims equality of men and women in all spheres of public and private life yet it is not so in practice. Among the vast sections of the population groveling in illiteracy, concepts like gender equality are unheard of. Even in the so-called modern and affluent Indian houses gender discrimination may be discernible in some form or the other. Unless the economic standard of the country improves, girls may continue to be considered as burden of the family and gender sensitization may remain elusive. However, greater stress on education of females especially in rural India will definitely reduce the gender gap as education equips a person with courage to fight against discrimination.

Statistics reveal that work done by women not valued properly especially house hold work. Women perform 2/3rd of the world's work and they earn the 1/10th of the world's income and women own less than the 1/100th of the world's property. Statistics also reveal that there are 65.5% literate women in India as compared to 82.1% males. 26.1% of women form the workforce in rural India as compared to 54.7% of men. The average salary of women in rural areas in 2009-10 was Rs.155.87 and that of the men was Rs.249.15. A total of 24,270 cases

of crime against women were reported in India in 2011. The recent rape case of Nirbhaya has yet again revealed the sorry state of women in our modern society.

SCHOOL AND GENDER SENSITIZATION

Schools have to be more vigilant and careful in providing good-quality education and should provide proper care to the child. Only then can we expect children to grow strong academically, physically and morally. Schools should provide sufficient scope for engaging the child's mind in various pursuits beyond the pale of academics so that their abundant energies may be diverted in creative activities. This would naturally curb the negative tendencies in children who are likely to develop a more positive attitude towards others. Students should be involved in-group activities involving both the sexes so that the curiosity and inhibitions regarding the opposite sex end. Cases of sexual misconduct within the school should be identified and dealt with strictly. The guilty, have to be counseled or punished depending on the severity of the case. The students including both boys and girls should be enlightened about the essential equality of all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, race or gender. Teachers should treat the students in a humane manner so that the students also behave likewise while dealing with their peers. Right attitudes have to be developed in the students so that they abstain from any kind of objectionable behaviour. Students can also act in groups helping each other to thwart the attempt of any abuser.

Teachers in schools should be ready to act as aids in helping students deal with such situations. Guidance by NGOs engaged in this field can also help to train children in tackling such situations. The schools should act in close collaboration with the guardians as the students receive the first impressions of life at home itself and ideas formed at the formative stages of life continue to linger in the later stages also.

This gender consciousness unfortunately is further strengthened in schools when we quickly label a boy who is crying as sissy or acting like a girl. Even in subject selection this consciousness is so overpowering that girls usually opt for fine arts, home science or biology. Maths is generally for boys. Girls going in for medical profession usually specialize in Gynecology, Paediatrics or physiotherapy; rarely do we find female cardiologist or oncologists. This biasness is found in every field – in Engineering it is computers and electronics for girls, Civil and mechanical is for boys. In M.B.A. girls usually go in for Marketing and HRD whereas Sales is for boys. Tradition fosters gender aspirations in their students by encouraging females to choose occupations in consonant with future husbands and children. Our society still defines high paying profession and the drive & competitiveness needed to succeed in them as masculine.

Again when we look at the world of sports here also feminine and less aggressive games are for girls like badminton, tennis, swimming or athletics. Sports like Cricket, football are more popular with boys although female teams for such sports exist but they are not so popular. Girls usually are left for cheerleading to boost and motivate their male counterparts. Although there are exceptions like Alka Tomar, Mary Kom who have made a mark for themselves in such allegedly manly sports like wrestling and boxing. This discrimination in the field of

sports is a world wide phenomena. This creates a prejudiced image on the impressionable young minds and which they carry with themselves for the rest of their lives. Whenever they encounter an image which clashes with their established views there is conflict which we are witnessing in the varied forms of violence and atrocities on women these days.

MEASURES

Gender sensitization is needed in every sphere of our lives be it schools, society, peer groups etc. This stereotyped image needs a complete overhaul especially the one depicted in our movies. But it should begin at the very grass root levels when the young mind begins to take shape i.e. at school. Because school is the second home of the child .It should begin from the very basic. They should be taught that girls or boys are not different .They are just two separate individuals who might be physically different but this physical difference should not guide their behaviour. Children should be taught to respect each others' feelings and accept each others' capabilities. The below mentioned measures could prove to be helpful as:

- ⇒ Equality under law, equality of opportunity, equality of voice and equality of outcomes should be promoted or encouraged.
- ⇒ Gender free participation in decision making and access to resources should be increased.
- ⇒ First sensitize the teachers then parents hence community and society will be sensitized.
- ⇒ Gender free content elaboration should be promoted.
- ⇒ Teachers should stop IGNORING and start SCORING.
- ⇒ Teachers should KILL SYMPATHY and they should INSTILL EMPATHY among students. There are several ways in which we can instill gender sensitivity among our students. Morning assemblies can be organized to promote gender equality. Skits, debates, street plays and panel discussions can also be conducted to sensitize the students to this issue of national importance. Not only this, the subject of gender equality could be integrated with the subjects. Students can be asked to carry out surveys to assess the prevalence of gender inequality, for eg. students can be asked to find out the names of some famous Indian women physicists/ mathematicians. Apart from this, value education classes can also act as a handy tool to motivate students to respect everyone irrespective of sex. A meeting with parents can be organized by the Principal in order to teach them to set a good example of gender equality in front of their children. School counselors must take up this issue and address children. The knowledge about human sexuality must be imparted to all the students. Adolescent Education Programmes should be made a part of the school curriculum. Gender equality must be the objective of any Adolescent Education Programme. Students must be taught to use this information responsibly. Children must be made aware of their rights and must be taught to respect each other. Girl students in particular must be trained in self defence.

- ⇒ Teachers should REINFORCE instead of ENFORCE of various choices of subjects, hobbies and other co-curricular activities.
- ⇒ Schools should promote humanitarian view and human rights.
- ⇒ Co-Education should be promoted so that access to education should be enhanced.
- ⇒ Image associated with what types of games one can play should also be broken. Girls should be encouraged to take up subjects for which they have aptitudes and which they want to pursue even if it goes against conventions. Stereotypes must be broken and children should be encouraged to do what their heart desire and not be deterred by the dictates of the society. Choice of a career should be their own decision and it should not be affected by what the society expects them to do. If possible gender free competitions should be organized.
- ⇒ Gender sensitivity should be made a part of the curriculum. The students should be made aware about the contribution of the females in the development of the society and how the two sexes can co-exist. Merely worshipping her as a goddess is not sufficient; she should be treated with respect as an individual. The society has to realize the immense potential they are wasting by denying equal status and opportunities to girls. However the position of women in society has changed little. Every day, newspapers are replete with the news of rape, molestation, domestic-violence or any other such crime against women. Girl students have the highest dropout rate in the rural areas, there is discrimination related to the salary earned by women especially in the rural areas. Women are subjected to discrimination at every stage in their life.
- ⇒ In order to bring women at par with their male counterparts, the need of the hour is to instill gender Sensitization among the youth. Gender Sensitization can be defined as the modification of behavior and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other sex. It helps people in examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the realities they thought they know. Since home and school influence a child's development the most, it becomes imperative that such training begins from here to nip the problem in the bud.
- ⇒ The school being a miniature society, the first step of gender equality should begin at the school level. The safety of woman has been a matter of concern right from the days of yore. In the absence of effective legislation and punitive measures for the wrong doers, the safety of the girl child is a topic that plagues the mind of every parent. That is why we make a bee line for exclusive schools for boys and for girls, special seats reserved for women in buses, special compartments for ladies in trains etc. But in life, instead of such escapist tendencies to safe guard women, our effort should be to make the society and the country a safe and comfortable place for ladies as well as for men.
- ⇒ Many women who have inveigled themselves into key positions in society still feel insecure and find their positions precarious. Some are filled with extreme competitive spirit. 'What men can do, women can do better' is a motto that the modern woman is bent on proving over and over again. In the process she is unconsciously generating

jealousy, inferiority complex and other negative emotions in men. This will do more harm than good. Right from the primary level, boys and girls should understand that though they have gender differences, both the male and the female species of human kind have an important and worthy role to play in the great drama of life. There should be healthy relationship based on respect, understanding and concern. In the matter of brain power, skill and talents, some may be superior or inferior but that has nothing to do with the gender.

⇒ Parents are to a great extent responsible for such discrimination. Right from a young age, they expect the girl child to conform to the role of the meek, submissive and lesser human being while the boy in the family gets away without punishment for his cruel pranks. The school provides the right environment to do away with such rigid social mores. The teacher takes the pride of place as mentor and guide, showing the child its place in society. The days of damsels in distress and knights in shining armour are over. Let us embolden our girls to stand their ground and fight for their rights. Let us sensitize our boys to the fact that a six pack is not all that defines masculinity and that brain power is mightier than brawn power. Value education should be a part of the school curriculum so that girls and boys can imbibe values and have an insight into the intricate fabric of society in which each has an important role to play. Let them understand that thoughtfulness, regard, respect and concern for others will pave the way for smoother running of society than aggressiveness, impudence and gross disregard for others' feelings.

CONCLUSION

Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi rightly remarked, 'Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in every minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.' It's time we gave women their due and respect them for their efforts because when the women in India will be able to walk safely at night only then will India be able to attain full freedom. The general moral debasement of our society is also responsible for disrespect for women. If the morality of the child improves then he will display greater respect for women and cases of sexual abuse or assault in educational institutions will reduce. In the modern times, earning money has become the prime motive of man and the child is imbued with the same zeal. Teachers, guardians and educational institutions are geared at academic advancement as it is considered as a sure way to success in life. Success in life is equated with earning money. When the primary goal of education becomes moneymaking then moral values definitely take a back seat in schools and colleges. Cases of sexual misconduct in schools are a direct result of the failure of guardians and teachers in inculcating moral values in children. Though, students are taught moral values as part of the curriculum yet it is done in a perfunctory manner. Inculcation of moral values in children has to be done in a very systematic manner by narration of stories with moral overtones. Such narration should be done to students at a very young age by a conscientious teacher. This needs to be followed up even in the middle and senior levels in schools. Moral uprightness should be lauded so that the seeds of moral values planted in children at a young age take firm roots. Teachers and guardians have to take

a joint responsibility in this regard. They must understand that they can act as catalysts in bringing about a change in children's mindsets and in society in general. The behaviour of teachers cannot be considered to be above board and they are often found to be behaving immorally. Sadly, enough schools are also not very careful in the recruitment of teachers. Most private schools operate as business houses and the sole concern is to earn money. Thus, the noble motive of imparting man-making education is lost.

It can be well concluded in the Foliowing lines:

SAMAJHNI HAI AGAR SAMVEDNA TO FEEL KARNI HOGI VEDNA,

IS VEDNA KO BHEDNA HI TO HAI SAMVEDNA.

YADI KARNA HAI IS VEDNA KA PRATIKAR,

TO JAGRUK HO PRAKHNE HONGE HAMARE ADHIKAR.

YADI VASTAV ME KARNA CHAHTA HAI SAMAJ KO GENDERLY SENSETIZE,

TO KARANE HONGE HAME SAMAJ KO USKE KARTAVYA REALIZE.
