Abstract

In recent times, there has been widespread debate on how education is the most effective means in impacting and re-orienting gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles; and on its role in changing traditional mindset in society. The education system today promotes a linear assembly line mindset, while recent advances in technology make it imperative to encourage a different non-linear mindset among young people breaking across all economic groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education certainly has the potential to play a key role in gender formation and change. Gender is a socially constructed and intersectional identity: it always intersects with social class, ethnicity and religion, culture, disability, sexuality, age etc. Education itself offers real opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes.

2. CONSTRAINTS TO EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Some of the broad constraints in educating a female are enumerated below-
(i) Access and retention in education - Problems of gender disparity and discrimination begin with access to schooling. Access and retention problems deepen at higher levels of education with the GPI at lower secondary and upper secondary levels dropping to 0.73 and 0.67 respectively (UNESCO, 2004). Insufficient attention is being given to social and cultural barriers which prevent girls and women from entering the education system. Issues like long distances to school, poor sanitation facilities, poverty (because of paucity of money, parents prefer to educate boys than girls) etc. impact access to education.

(ii) Traditional Patriarchal Mindset and discrimination - Even as the thresholds of schooling completion increase, with significantly narrowing gender gaps in primary education in particular, discrimination against girls at all stages i.e. primary, secondary and higher education remains an issue. Economic and social privilege also affect gendered patterns of access, with girls in secondary and higher education predominantly drawn from higher income and social groups, endowed with higher social status.

(iii) Undervaluation of female labour and stereotyping - The deeply embedded undervaluation of female labour, identified primarily with the reproductive or household sphere, underlies the belief in many communities that educating females bring low returns, as skills required in the reproductive sphere require domestic socialization and not many years of schooling. The gender division of labour continues to reward women less in the workplace. This has resulted in relatively lower female education and work participation reflecting the ideological bias against considering women as household bread-winners. Low valuation of female labour in the market place and association of female labour with fulfilling domestic responsibilities including child rearing has led to a deep seated cultural association of women with the institutions of marriage and family.

While gender inequalities intensify with poverty, caste inequalities and geographical location (particularly in underdeveloped rural areas), particular gender-differentiated ideologies cut across all social groups, explaining why in all social groups, girls lag behind boys in access to and participation in education. These include specific views on the appropriate roles to be played by women in family and society, and the underlying controls placed on female mobility and chastity. These gender-specific ideologies are responsible for the continued wide gaps in female secondary schooling enrolment.

(iv) Sexual harassment and violence - It is the major constraining factor preventing parents from freely sending their girls to school. Public spaces in India continue to be relatively hostile to the presence of women, and rarely function in a way to make women feel secure and confident. Transporting girls to school and back safely, especially where secondary schools and universities are far away from their homes, is a critical policy measure that has received scant attention. Similarly, while initiatives to teach girls self defence or cycling have been widely hailed as critical components of gender-sensitive education, they have not really been taken up and promoted widely through the education system.

(v) Reinforcement of gender roles - Ideologies that shape female and male identities in Indian society are mutually reinforcing across institutions, such as the family, workplace,
schools and community leading to vicious cycles of under-investment in females. Female education has suffered as a result of this, though it is well-known that breaking the cycle of multiple deprivations can be significantly furthered through ensuring quality education for girls and boys.

(vi) Reinforcement of gender discrimination in the present education system – In the process of both socialisation and education, it is the educational institutions that play a central role. For instance, stereotypes pertaining to responsibilities, roles and opportunities, to which children are initially exposed in family settings, are endorsed in educational institutions. So schools are places where the socialising process is reinforced and given legitimacy and authenticity. The social knowledge relating to gender is constructed, validated and perpetuated by schools through textbooks, pedagogy skills, assessment and the academic milieu.

3. GROUNDS COVERED SO FAR
The present Expert Committee referred to numerous government of India policy documents notable of which are Report of the Kothari Commission (GOI, 1964-66) and the National Policy on Education 1986 (GOI, 1986) and its POA in 1992 (GOI, 1992a) all of which have put enormous emphasis on promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other.

National Policy on Education - The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 which is a landmark in the field of policy on women’s education in that it recognised the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognised that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem.

The objective of the Committee was also to review existing policies, programmes and schemes for welfare of women and children in the field of education - In this regard, the committee reviewed the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) Programme scheme as an example. It is pertinent to mention here that the focus of the programme is to increase girl child enrolment, so with innovative programmes like this which lead to increased enrolment rates more and more girls will have access to public spaces. Hence imperative to combine academic instruction with healthy and gender sensitive social interaction, in order to make public spaces safe and also assist in broadening their social networks and sources of social support. For this mobilizing the support of the community is likely to improve the cultural acceptability, effectiveness, and sustainability of such programs.

Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) - Introduced in 2001 reaches out to every district in the country. Its main motive is to bridge and eliminate gender differences in enrollment, retention and quality of learning. It promotes gender equality through free text books for girls, separate toilets for girls, recruitment of 50% women teachers.
4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

Compliance with the National Education Policy i.e. the factors indicated on gender sensitivity be compulsorily implemented. The National Policy (1986) states, ‘Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators and the active involvement of educational institutions’. Despite almost three decades the points indicated have not been implemented (Part IV Education for equality), and should be implemented immediately.

Formation of task Force - Task force should be formed for change in syllabus to inculcate gender sensitivity and awareness of laws relating to the protection of women/human rights.

- To bring about gender equality, clear terms of reference be given to the Task Force and a time bound limitation so that results can be seen to ensure that the new generation of India is sensitive to gender and human rights issues.
- Urban and rural schools be treated appropriately keeping the cultural variation in mind.
- Gender sensitisation should become a part of the curriculum. Every subject may adopt a holistic approach where gender sensitivity becomes an integral part of it.
- Like presently, all text books commence with the preamble of The Constitution of India, similarly text books/syllabus to include specific laws for protection of women, so that students are not only equipped with life skills but also learn to respect the law. This should be done right from the primary classes to the higher level according to their capacity, with priority for inclusion given to laws related to crimes which are on the rise.

5. Recommendations for Educational institutions

- **Value/ Moral Education** – Value education or Moral education classes play a very crucial role in gender sensitization. In a world where the senses are being continuously blasted with negative messages of violence, dishonesty, greed and corruption; it becomes important to inculcate values associated with aspirations concerning importance of women, national identity, national economic growth and positive values associated with prevailing understandings of capitalism. The number of Value/Moral Education classes should be increased to at least twice or thrice every week and compulsory for students at all levels of their education.

- **Discussions on Gender** – Unfortunately in India violence is built in the linguistic structure and underlines the terms of engagement with persons of the opposite sex. Hence the need for Section 509 in The Indian Penal Code, 1860 which makes word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman a punishable offence. In educational institutions there should be discussions on gender and introduction of sexuality among students specially boys in harmony with the culture and intellectual level of the student. Discussions to covers a wide range of topics such as the
sexualisation of society; evolving forms of parenthood and family formation; transgender, sexuality, crime and deviance; the meaning of a variety of forms of masculinity and femininity; and the implications of gender and sexuality for health and wellbeing.

- **Online programmes** –
  - Online alcohol and drug abuse training and counseling programmes must be conducted for students. To not only be aware of the consequences of drug abuse, but also learn how much consumption of alcohol is considered ‘responsible drinking’; specially since alcohol and drug abuse is not uncommon among the youth and often crimes are committed being under influence of alcohol/drugs.
  - Students be taught online about the precautionary measures to be adopted while venturing into social networking websites, especially in view of the rising cyber crimes against women, specially harassment and misuse of social networking sites.

- **Imparting knowledge on IT** - Educating students on not only how databases work but also on what security measures should be taken while working and having full access to the internet. Schools and institutions should be equipped with cyber law classes to help students understand the repercussions of growing technologies.

- **Pre – Marital Counseling** - Premarital counseling should be offered to students since it helps both male and female prepare for marriage. It ensures that both partners have a strong, healthy relationship thus increasing chances for a stable and satisfying marriage. Premarital counseling can also help identify weaknesses that could become bigger problems during marriage, specially in view of the fact that most women in India abandons their name and their home to marry and live with man who is a relative stranger; and is often dependent on him for most if not all her needs.

- **Health and Well being Counseling** – Age appropriate gender sensitive life skills based reproductive and sexual health programs should be integrated at various levels of education, with emphasis on health and appropriate eating habits.

- **Formation of Gender Clubs** – Encourage formation of Gender Clubs, the membership of which includes both male and female. It is important that boys are included in discussions of issues that affect women, so that the focus is not only on changing the behaviour of girls but also helping boys understand their responsibilities. Gender club Competitions may be organised based on gender sensitivity. The Gender Club to develop a manual on Gender Sensitization. The magazine would have a local approach and assist in making young individuals aware of gender issues. This magazine could include articles by social activists, principals and renowned resource persons and could invite suggestions from students and teachers.
  - The Gender Club to organize outreach programmes in places like destitute homes, red light areas, and talk to such women on gender issues, while informing them on their rights and protection provided under our country’s legal system.

- **Workshops** - A choice of lectures and interactive workshops should be aimed to make gender stereotypes in society visible, to strengthen the student’s ability to identify these
issues, and to be sensitive to the gender stereotypes. Lesson should include activities for increasing children’s awareness of legal matters. The teacher conducting the workshop/delivering the lecture should be specially qualified for the purpose.

- **Counseling Centres** - Every school or institution which provides higher education should have a counseling centre. Violence in educational institutions, whether mental or physical has numerous ill effects on the female student with the possibility of impacting attendance and performance. Teachers should be alert to behavioral changes and anomalies in the student, recognizing the signals refer student to the counseling centre; and not dismiss it as typical adolescent problem.

- **Gender Equality** - Gender biases should be eliminated in every spheres and all students irrespective of gender, caste or creed should be encouraged to play sports and work on projects according to their maximum capability.

**Recommendations for policy makers and the executive**

- Need to sensitise law enforcement agencies, elected representatives and executive on gender issues since often it has been seen that sexist, regressive and crass remarks have been made with a tendency to cave in to mounting patriarchal pressure.

- Every policy for the masses is formulated by the legislature, executed by the executives and implemented by the police. It is important that gender sensitisation of the policy makers and the executive, initiated from the village level to the central level takes place through the medium of interactive workshops and refresher courses.

- The executive should also be sensitised on gender issues. Combined workshops should be conducted where officials come together at the district level. **This can be organized in the way:**

  a) everyone would know each other. i.e., the gap which exists shall be reduced,
  b) new ideas can be exchanged which can then be implemented for the betterment of the society, for it is an undisputed fact that a dynamic society needs to change its mindset.

- Discrimination of women by disparity in wages, job promotion and advancement, denial of jobs to women in public/private sector employment should be discouraged and reported.

- **Positive Gender discrimination should be considered in favour of women in order to:**
  - Bridge the existing gap between men and women.
  - Enable women to have an impact at policy making level.
  - Enable women to be fully represented at important levels of the national machinery, especially the higher levels.

6. **CONCLUSION**

The women issues are not a static form in which the women can think and respond in the static form, it is the flexible paradigm that shows that how the women confronts the challenges in her life. The challenges are in it creating various issues in the women’s life and women can think that people of society are still unaware of the methods that show that
how these issues can be resolved. The women researchers are doing well under the way that is highly considerable but constitutes less power than the women responded in an introspective way. The community sets a mindset that the women issues are the core purpose of both platforms so that the issues could meet the pragmatic strategies at the vast range. The power is unequally divided between the power responded and power researchers that is very useful in the manner.

7. REFERENCES


