

# Gender Sensitization and Gender Inclusivity with Respect to Role in Education

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## Abstract

Gender sensitization is a way of creating awareness among the masses about issues related to gender equality. The nature of this process is revolutionary and unconventional as it strives to change the previous concepts related to gender stereotypes, so it modifies an individual's behaviour, his outlook and thought process to behold the society with a newer perspective treating male and female both as being avoiding any discrimination. With the changing world gender sensitive issues have gained the attention of the world due to discrimination and exploitation against girls and women regarding and various movements and protests have taken place from time to time fighting for equality. After home, which is regarded as the first school of a child he enters the formal education setup where she/he has to gain awareness on gender sensitization. Education in present times is following the Gender Sensitive Education models to focus on teaching techniques and methods that promote gender equality through course curriculum and teaching content by propagating gender positive material. Learning activities involve innovative strategies to develop respect for other gender roles strive to contribute in this direction. The concept of Gender inclusivity includes the idea of gaining education in equal measure, working together, inculcating collaborative skills with other gender and identify the instances of gender biases through law and cultural changes. The paper intends to focus on all these issues with special reference to the field of education which plays a crucial role in shaping a society educated in gender sensitive issues.

**Keywords:** Gender sensitization, gender inclusivity, school, higher education

Schools are the backbone of human society acting as the guiding torch for future generations to shape the fate of a nation. They equip the future generations to deal with the future challenges through education and skill development. Schools offer numerous opportunities to the students' right from a very young age to polish and cultivate their skills which are equally important to the academic laurels gained by them. However in the present times the school education system tends to be gender sensitive and inclusive to provide equal learning opportunities to the boys and girls both as they play an important role in building up a society.

Gender discrimination and gender biases have been ruling the mind of masses since centuries due to which girl education has seriously suffered. There have been cases of serious gender biased violence whenever leadership issues are arising in the school level. In order to create an equitable society the process of change should start from school. In this context training must be given to the young aspiring

minds on gender sensitive issues and gender inclusivity. Schools play a crucial role as in these formative years of their education that starts with the elementary stage when children learn to interact with the people and the world around. Thus the awareness on gender sensitivity and inclusivity must begin right from this stage reflecting children to live and exist in a gender biased free environment.

Promoting equality is one of the most important aspect of gender inclusivity. Education is a great equalizer in terms of promoting equality in schools and this field still faces great challenges in terms of gender biased terms, language and content in the curricula. Also the Right to Education Act of 2009 has made education essential for all children from 6-14 years irrespective of their gender.

Gender specific challenges are met in the schools by providing unbiased environment for learning in which even the girls feel comfortable to come and move around. In this respect provision of the sanitary napkins to girls, mentor mentee system, psychological counselling to students and parents both are quite helpful in generating gender sensitive awareness to create a safe secure atmosphere for girls to gain education. UNESCO's strategy to promote gender equality in education ensures a future world in which girls and boys, men and women have equal rights and opportunities for their empowerment. The vision is centred on the concept "Educate. Empower and transform".

In India the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme was launched in 2015 with a aim to address declining Child Sex Ratio CSR and empowerment of girls through education. Its main objective was to prevent gender biased sex selective elimination and to ensure equal rights to education and opportunities to girls. A Flagship programme of Gender Equity Movement in Schools GEMS 2008 was started in schools in Goa. Since 2008 from its time of start now GEMS has touched about 2.5 million students in 25000 schools and about 26000 teachers have received standard training in this respect with the expansion of the scheme in Philippines, Bangladesh and Vietnam:

The GEMs curriculum has proven to increase gender-equitable attitudes and decrease students' tolerance for violent behaviour. With over one in three women globally experiencing intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives, these attitude shifts are essential. ([www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org))

Children spend a lot of time in classroom and are most of the times in touch with their peer group. The program therefore is reachable to the classrooms where the sessions are conducted consisting of a curriculum which engages young boys and girls in a discussion to critically reflect on the issues related to gender norms and violence. The programme is launched in partnership with Committee of Resource Organizations for Literacy CORO and The Tata Institute of Social Sciences TISS with an aim to engage young girls and boys for discussing issues related to Gender norms and violence. The programme also employs creative games, talk shows, activities and role plays to make the discussion interesting and participative. The launch has gain a wide popularity in states like Goa and city Kota of Rajasthan by employing various approaches along with the merging of the program with school curriculum in effective manner. In Mumbai the programme has been successfully implemented in about 45 schools.

However dealing with the gender issues at the school level is a big challenge as the mindset comes from family and community culture that is displayed at the school when the interaction takes place of the two sexes. Schools can play the best role in remoulding the mindset of young students in the context of gender related issues and gender sensitivity but at the same time the idea of changing and transforming the cultural mindset and community norms is a herculean task.

In this context Right to Education 2009 has played a crucial role to make the primary education necessary for all. Provision of menstrual hygiene products for girls and health awareness camps on the topic have provided a free atmosphere to talk on the gender sensitive issues as a biological phenomenon. The Menstrual Hygiene Scheme or MSH as a part of National Health Mission was implemented in 2011 in about 107 selected districts in 17 states where a pack of 6 sanitary napkins was provided to rural innocent girls at the cost of Rs 6. The main aim of the scheme was to create awareness among girls for menstrual hygiene, to increase the use of sanitary napkins as a safe and sanitized product during the menstrual cycle and the free disposal of sanitary napkins in an eco-friendly manner. The target group for the above was girls aged ten to nineteen years at rural areas.

From 2014 onwards, funds are now being provided to States/UTs under National Health Mission for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs for provision to rural adolescent girls at a subsidized rate of Rs 6 for a pack of 6 napkins. The ASHA will continue to be responsible for distribution, receiving an incentive @ Rs 1 per pack sold and a free pack of napkins every month for her own personal use.

The Accredited Social Health Activist ASHA is also authorized to conduct monthly meetings at the Aanganwadi centres or any other similar platforms to ensure personal and menstrual hygiene among girls. In order to ensure a 360 degree approach there is a range of IEC material that has been developed around the issue of MHS to create awareness among young adolescent girls and this programme includes large number of video and audio, reading materials that give medically authentic information on the MHS.

The syllabus outlines, teaching curricula and learning materials at schools are efficient tools to create awareness among the school kids and shape progressive thoughts and ideas in their mind. The textbooks and teaching materials often display ideas that showcase the gender stereotypes, gender biases and treatment of girls and minors as disrespectable beings therefore it is need to take into consideration that how inequality and gender biases are addressed in the textbooks and teaching materials provided at schools. The teaching materials and methodologies have long term impact and consequences on the mind of students to impact their social behaviour and attitude towards other sex in the coming future. It can also affect their self-esteem, academic performance and career aspirations therefore the gender biased issues in the teaching materials must be addressed by adopting gender neutral language and ensuring that both genders receive equal respect and importance in the textbooks. The Swadeshi National Agency for Education has developed guidelines for gender sensitive teaching.

Mentorship and support to the students at the emotional and psychological level is provided by the teachers at the school to make the learning atmosphere more collaborative and efficient. The problem of

gender inequality and biases can be easily addressed once the teacher student relationship has the flair of mentorship also in it. In this context the young boys and girls can be provided ideal role models to inspire them and in this case the lady teachers and female staff themselves can share their life stories to reflect the specific idea of women empowerment, importance of education and hard work, importance of success and the way things are managed skilfully by a woman performing different roles of a wife, a mother and professional. The students can directly relate and connect these stories to them as the teachers are not special beings but the ones among them only.

Apart from the above multiple examples from the national and international scenarios can be given where exemplars have overcome the challenges in education and development and have created supporting networks. The mentorship of such can help students achieve not only success but also overcome gender biases as the role models may be male or female.

A tie up and collaboration with the community organizations, NGO's and social groups are providing and equipping students with latest resources and information. Schools also share the major responsibility of creating a learning inclusive environment in which the pivotal role is played by the teachers to achieve gender equity. Declining sex ratio in which the socio economic factors play a crucial role that affect the survival of a girl child. In a report presented by NCERT which says that declining sex ratio has direct connection with women empowerment and education in which some statistics say: : Delhi – 75 per cent female literacy, sex ratio 821; Punjab – 63.5 per cent female literacy, sex ratio 874.8

The statistics display a paradoxical impact of gender and sex selective issues in education and shows the failure of education in the context of women empowerment. Schooling must ensure gender equality and reinforce it across the country. Schools must provide equal opportunities and roles to the girl child in terms of leadership, teaching learning, coaches and other important teaching and administrative position to instil leadership skills among them. Gender equality texts in reading curriculum help to drive off the prejudices and learning capacities of girls as they are considered weak and unfit for studying subjects like sciences and mathematics and always the learning stereotypes are imposed on them for traditional courses. the story below by Manjrekar is trying to clarify the idea as under. The story has been included in the curriculum:

### **Girls and Mathematics:**

Kaushal's Story this is the story of Kaushal, who loves numbers. So good is she at counting that her old grandmother, with whom she lives, always asks her to do the daily accounts. Kaushal is 10. Her parents and her younger brother live in a nearby city, where her father is a mill-worker. Her grandmother works in the rich people's 'bungalas' during the day, and helps with her studies every evening. Kaushal is proud of her grandmother, for she can read and write, and only a few women in her basti can do that: those who went to school for a few years before getting married and moving away from their parents' homes have forgotten how to. Kaushal wonders about that: how can things that sit in your brain disappear? Mathematics is Kaushal's favourite subject. She likes it even better than craft, which is easy and which the teacher always helps the girls out with. She loves to come to the blackboard and solve sums in front of the whole class. The boys who sit in front - the teacher calls them the worst troublemakers - don't bother her too much, and the girls who do well in exams are not as good as her in doing sums. During

other periods, Kaushal sits in her place at the back of the class and draws. She hates the noise in the class room, and thinks that the teacher should throw all the boys out. Most of them are bad at doing sums anyway. The teacher always says that the girls are zero in mathematics, that they are only interested in talking and playing. Kaushal hates this - after all, she is always getting the sums correct, right there in front of everybody! But what she hates even more is that the girls also say this, they are so scared of themselves. Her parents tell her that doing so many sums will make her brain weak for housework: will you teach your mother-in-law mathematics? They laugh. Some of her friends are already engaged to boys from their villages, and are going to leave school next year. Kaushal knows that her grandmother won't let that happen to her, at least not till she finishes school. After that, who knows? There are some jobs where they need girls who love numbers.

From: Manjrekar, 2001

In an article by Annabelle Timsit (2019) the concept of inequality between boys and girls begins right from childhood but recent studies in the field are trying to address in the best possible ways. It has been observed that after birth babies immediately start grasping things from the surroundings as inputs to understand their own identity in the world. In a study that was published in 2010 in Annual Review of Psychology speaks about children developing a sense of self in about 18 months after which they actively start engaging them to seek information about what things mean and how they should behave. In the due course of the process they adopt the gender normative behaviour after which they associate their updated knowledge on gender issues with the gender stereotypes like most of the times seeing girls playing with dolls and boys preferring cars, and other mechanic devices. At the age between three to four years children attend preschool and they tend to strengthen these ideas on boys and girls or gender differences. Therefore early education during childhood is an important phase of development that is capable of shaping a child's view on gender equality. Violence and discrimination against women is pervasive and therefore a change is surely needed and in this context Samyukta Subrahmanian , a global scholar at the Brookings institute and programme head of Pratham Education Foundation contemplated on early childhood education policy.

In the Indian context Preschools and Aanganwadis run by state government are the centres of elementary education for kids. Subrahmanian's observation in this context revealed the following facts:

“Through their own daily observations, children come to understand that mothers care for and serve others but are not cared for or served themselves, that they remain silent during conflict with fathers, that they are emotionally available to others, and that they are homemakers,” Subrahmanian writes.

However at the state government level still he gender neutral approach needs to be adopted through the based curriculum. Often it was observed that teachers perpetuated the gender stereotypes and allowed students not to accept the challenges which most of the times began with the school uniforms. Pants were chosen for boys and skirts for girls and most of the times the teachers reprimanded girls to 'sit properly' in the classroom every time making them gender conscious.

Subrahmanian directly felt uniform interfering in play and other activities of the kids. As per the researches playing outdoor games and physical exercises are important both for boys and girls for their multidimensional development and growth, so uniform getting in the way created huge problem for girls. Subrahmanian's work and study was observational in which she compared the outcomes and she felt that students gaining education in such schools emerged with less gendered ideas. However it was not purely the uniform that is worn is responsible for gender biases but i talked about the varying instructions that were given to boys and girls and that were different to say that what girls should do and

not do in that uniform, but boys were given no such instructions. Here she talks about uniformity in the context of school uniforms. Subrahmanian finally resolves to say:

“This solution that I’m suggesting is then preventive, it’s not curative. You’re not waiting for the problem to happen and then think of the solution. You’re thinking of if you want equal relations between the two genders, then you are trying to look at it from the roots.”

To conclude, in order to create a gender equality environment where both the genders can thrive academically schools, communities and policy makers need to work together along with some interventions from the stakeholders at the community and policy levels that can be implemented in combination to create a comprehensive solution for addressing gender equality in education.

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