

An Abolishing the Gender Inequality in Education: A Critical Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This paper with an aim of sensitizing everyone about the concern relating to gender inequality and tried to analyse the international conventions and constitutional mandate along with a statutory mechanism to tackle the discrimination based on sex through education. The Constitution of India visualizes the development of a pluralistic, open society, based on the principles of equality and social justice. Gender discrimination may be latent, patent, open or subtle. It is a mind-set that operates within a given situation. It is the result of human practice and prevailed since time immemorial. Everyone has to be reminded of the inherent equality of all through education. The purpose is to minimize and remove prejudices and complexes transmitted through the social environment. It is important to ensure that in our country all the educational programmes are carried out in strict conformity with the secular values keeping in mind equality. The education system must play a positive role in the empowerment of people and the removal of all kinds of biases which are basically man-made. The efforts to eliminate gender discrimination are continued. In this direction, various provisions under the constitution and statutes have been incorporated and implemented with little success.

The Constitution of India visualizes the development of a pluralistic, open society, based on the principles of equality and social justice. The education system must play a positive role in the empowerment of people and the removal of all kinds of biases which are basically man-made. Everyone has to be reminded of the inherent equality of all through education. It is important to ensure that in our country all the educational programmes are carried out in strict conformity with the secular values keeping in mind equality. Gender-based inequality results in the female literacy rate being much lower, at 65.46 percent than that of their male counterparts, at 82.14 percent. Lack of education leads to many problems among women i.e., uneducated mothers are less likely to send their own children to school and often do not participate in the labour force or the political process. Without education, women lack confidence or knowledge to make their own choice and are encouraged or forced to marry early. India holds the miserable record of having the highest absolute number of child brides. A study compared women of higher educational accomplishment with women of lower educational accomplishment had less control over their families' food choices, showed less support for attempts to eat healthily, fewer opportunities to observe and learn good food-related practices, more perceived environmental constraints, and more ambiguous beliefs about the consequences of eating a nutritious diet. In this direction, Educators should foster a sense of equality, promote and strengthen the constitutional culture and stability among the students, parents and in society.

We often observe many differences among boys and girls in the family, in the playing field, inside the classroom. For instance, in general, boys are active, playful, bold, loud, confident, and difficult to control whereas girls are passive, quiet, gentle, self-righteous and easy to control. It is important for those who are in the education sector to appreciate how infants and toddlers learn to see themselves as girls and boys

in the adult images of women and men in their cultures. It is equally important to understand the process of sex role identity formation based on differential and discriminatory treatment, which leads to the formation of low self-concept in girls. This low self-concept among girls inhibits self-expression and achievement. There are some general perceptions regarding gender roles. Firstly, we not only observe the differences among girls and boys and also believe that these are natural and inherent in two sexes. We come to the conclusion that they are biological and hence unchangeable. Secondly, the social roles of men and women, being cultural artifacts, vary across space and time. Thirdly, these differences are the result of ages of social experiences of the two sexes -are socially created and determined, and, therefore changeable. Lastly, the present day human civilization both are demands and create new possibilities for the social roles of the two sexes as complementary and equal, globally. Now it is beyond doubt that the women have proved to be equally competent in all the spheres of life.

Educators should know about Self-concept and Self-esteem. Self-concept is how an individual views oneself. It is an individual's feelings and attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge about one's own attributes. Self-esteem is the dynamic aspect of self-concept through which an individual constantly evaluates oneself in relation to society. High self-esteem and high achievement motivation go hand in hand. The human organism has a need to be loved or to receive attention if unmet, can lead to pathological symptoms, even death. When an individual grows in an environment in which they learn negative self-regarding attitudes, they are likely to retain these concepts in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Sometimes we learn certain attitudes about ourselves which may not be valid and also get to know how others are trying to get us to unlearn these attitudes. Roles are the learned expectations prescribed for the standardized forms of

behaviour. Gender roles are learnt in the family, from parents, older siblings, and other members who provide role models appropriate to the sex of a person. Child-rearing practices have a marked effect on the development of self-concept among children. In our culture, experiences given to children are on the basis of their sex. Girls are valued little, often seen as a liability to be got rid of the lesser child. Special value accorded to male children comes home to girls very early.

It is important to deal with the concern that even though India has a clear policy on undifferentiated curricula for both sexes, biases and stereotypes creep through the learning materials as well as through those who handle them. One should spell out the concerns that are to be addressed by the teachers and administrators for eliminating sex biases in an endeavour to promote gender equality and positive self-concept through curriculum and life skills approach. It should be brought home to everyone through a curriculum that biological sex and social gender are separable concepts from a development point of view. Some suggestions for gender-sensitive curriculum transactions may be given. One, effective pictures and illustrations should show to the children that a woman is not merely a mother, but she can be a teacher, a doctor, a professor, an engineer, etc. It should be included in the textbook and reading materials. Two, depicting men and women in shared roles. Three, one can display the talent of women. Fourth, one can counter, prejudicial references in textbooks, if noticed. The textbooks are to be made free of gender bias and sex stereotypes. A gender-sensitive life skills approach to curriculum transaction includes all the skills necessary for the day to day functioning and covers areas such as family life education and lifesaving skills, etc. This approach could be a bid to alter the unequal gender relations and empower both boys and girls for a shared future by breaking down gender stereotyping and gender barriers in skill development. The NPE emphasizes the core values such as equality between sexes, ending social evils and practices derogatory to women etc. Therefore, the need to revise textbooks to remove gender bias and gender sensitize all educational personnel so that equality between sexes could be internalized through gender sensitive, gender inclusive curriculum and its transaction.

India has the second largest educational system in the world after China with a total enrolment of 191.63 million out of whom 80.54 million (42%) are girls (MHRD, 2001). Due to the strong gender focus of the government initiatives during the 1990s as also the pro-girl child, pro-women policies, and programmes during this decade, girls' education has progressed and the gender gaps have narrowed. It was suggested that although expectations for success and personal efficacy predict occupational choice, they are not the only predictors. The particular occupation selected also believed to depend on the value attached to various occupational characteristics. This analysis has a number of important implications for our understanding of gender differences in educational and vocational choices. Because socialization shapes individuals' self-perceptions and their goals, women, and men should acquire different self-concepts, different patterns of expectations for success across various activities, and different goals through the processes associated with gender role socialization. These socialization experiences can affect educational and vocational choices in several ways.

Primarily, gender role socialization could lead women and men to have different hierarchies of core personal values. Secondly, gender role socialization also could lead to females and males to different goals and activities. Thirdly, gender roles can influence the performance of those activities considered to be central to one's identity. Lastly, women and men could differ in the density of their goals and values.

Understanding women's occupational choices require a broad view of the options and roles available to women. Occupational choices are not made in isolation of other life choices, such as the decision to marry and have children, and the decision to balance one's occupational behaviours with one's other life roles. It is clear that many high achieving girls and women experience a conflict between traditionally feminine values and goals and the demands of traditionally male-typed highly competitive achievement activities. But many women resolve these conflicts in ways that appear to benefit both their physical health and the quality of their lives. Most women know that women in male-dominated occupations often face discrimination and harassment on their jobs, as well as more subtle forms of disapproval from their colleagues, friends, and relatives. The anticipation of these kinds of negative experiences can also deter women from selecting male-dominated and excessively time-consuming occupations. More equitable treatment and more family sensitive social policies and supports would likely facilitate women's willingness to consider a wide variety of occupational choices.

Gender is embedded in the structure of academic careers. It is important to understand gender inequality in academia by identifying and attempting to explain differential time allocation preferences, behaviours, and mismatches. It was observed that women faculty report preferring to spend a larger percentage of their work week on teaching and a smaller percentage on research, although these preferences are themselves shaped by gendered opportunities. A study also indicates that research and teaching time allocation preferences are shaped by the features of the institutions in which men and women are located. This suggests that gender-differentiated preferences may impart reflect the constraints women face in obtaining positions comparable to those of men.

Achieving gender equality is not a 'women's concern' but the responsibility of all in society. Empowering women and girls towards greater participation in development means working towards more balanced and equal power relations between the sexes. Nonetheless, the promotion of gender equality does not imply giving more power to women and taking away power from men. The promotion of equality between women and men is empowering for all. It allows both men and women to take part fully in social and economic life and leads to a win-win situation for both. Gender equality needs to be addressed in all development programmes and at all stages of the programming cycle. Gender equality is an issue which needs to be addressed in all development fields and at all stages of the programming cycle, in other words, at the planning and design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages. The advancement of women and girls is a necessary strategy whenever they are in a disadvantaged position as compared to men and boys. As current inequalities are often quite large, equal treatment of men and women from now on is therefore not sufficient because existing inequalities could remain or might even become larger. Gender specific measures are

usually needed to redress existing imbalances between the position of men and women until women can participate in, and benefit from, development on an equal footing with men.

The role of the constitution in ensuring gender justice is being recognized in modern times. It is most appropriate that the supreme law of the land should meaningfully address the woman question and respond to the challenges by stimulating the whole legal system towards a greater concern for, and protection of women. But the law cannot change a society overnight, but it can certainly ensure that the disadvantaged are not given a raw deal. However, the courts can certainly go beyond mere legality insulating women against injustice suffered due to biological and sociological factors. Indian judiciary has been very sensitive to women and women related issues. The Apex Court of India took a special interest in discharging its legal and constitutional obligations and safeguarding the interests of women in changing the situation and societal demands. Article 14 of the Constitution of India ensures to Women the right to equality and Article 15(1) specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and article 15(3) provides for affirmative and positive action in favour of women by empowering the state to make special provisions for them. Article 16 of the Constitution provides for equality of opportunity to all, in matters relating to public employment or appointment to any office and specifically forbids discrimination inter alia on the ground of sex. These articles are all justiciable and form the basis of our legal constitutional edifice.

Our natural obligation to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women has been elevated to the status of fundamental duty by Article 51A. The directive principles of State policy contained in Part IV of the Constitution direct the State to protect human rights of women including right to equal pay for equal work, the right to health and work in hygienic conditions, right to maternity benefits, and respect for international conventions have significant value in building the corpus of constitutional feminism.. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994, the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 are some of the enactments which owe their existence to those provisions of the Indian Constitution. Although these principles are strictly not justiciable, the Supreme Court of India, through its judicial activism, has infused dynamism into these non justiciable provisions and issued directions to the state to implement them. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution have served as a major breakthrough towards

enhancing the women's participation in the democratic process.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) reaffirming faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women, contemplated the entitlement of all cherished freedoms to all human beings without any distinction of any kind, including discrimination based on sex. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 and the International Covenant of Social and Political Rights, 1966 lay stress on equality between men and women. The Convention the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979 is the United Nations landmark treaty marking the struggle for women's rights. Described as the Bill of Rights for women, it spells out what constitutes discrimination against women and propagates strategies based on "non-discriminator" model, so that women's rights are seen to be violated if women are denied the same rights as men. The Covenant prohibits all distinctions and restrictions and the exclusion of the enjoyment and exercise of empowering women, her rights and freedom-civil, political, economic and cultural. But the law cannot remedy the inequalities and bring about justice, development, and empowerment. It can act as a springboard no doubt but much executive initiative, change in social mind-set and involvement of all sections of society is required to achieve the ends. All the legal provisions and international conventions should be made part of the curriculum of all courses.

In light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that a country like India has a long way to go before it can call itself a 'gender neutral' country. However, no simple and direct solutions are available to minimise gender inequality as gaps are rooted in norms and in cultural and social practices and are further consolidated by poor infrastructure and service delivery. Possibly, the change will come only through education which could certainly play a pivotal role in eliminating this gender inequality. It is very much essential to bring awareness among people about the benefit of gender equality. Ultimately, it is the change in social mind-set and involvement of all sections of society is required to achieve the ends with social awareness, cultural/fundamental restructuring, mind-set shifting and through widening access to public service delivery without discrimination on a gender basis. No government, be it state or central, can by itself bring long-lasting change. Government authorities, the donor community, the private sector, and civil society need to come together to act to close the gender gap, and a system of accountability should be put in place to record the aid they provide.

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