



Gender equity and sensitization: A review

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Abstract

Gender encompasses the socially constructed and culturally conditioned roles of men and women. The main thing is to understand how unequal power relations between the sexes - men and women - are shaped and operated. Gender and the resulting power relations are built into all institutions of society, be it the family, educational institutions, workplaces, beliefs, norms, etc. Gender relations do not function in a social vacuum but are the product of how institutions are organized and recreated. It is one of the most challengeable discrimination where individuals are distinguish with each other on the basis of gender. Gender sensitization is a movement where people with stereotype feeling, should be able to assure equal participation of both men and women in all sphere of life. Gender Sensitization is all about changing behavior and bringing empathy to the beliefs we hold about our own gender and about others. It helps people explore and question their own personal attitudes and beliefs the "reality" they thought they knew. Gender awareness makes men and women familiar with each other's existence and successful performance in the organization and at home. Gender is socially determined; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. All social institutions exhibit gender disparity because gender is seldom considered important and seldom understood. Gender roles are socially constructed according to their needs; when needs change these roles are also need to change. Gender sensitivity helps inspire respect in individuals, regardless of gender. Educators, scholars and teachers have a tremendous impact on socialization and gender formation Students' gender roles influence quality of life and distribution of power. Through education, gender awareness in educational institutions can sensitize children, parents and other community members to their future roles as men and women in society. Also, it is the power of education to bring about great social change throughout society. At present, gender and women studies have become the major subject of study in higher education. It is also included in the syllabus of teacher education, so that pupil teacher can learn how to deal with issues related with gender sensitization in a smooth manner. Therefore, educational institutions should make every effort to promote access to gender-sensitive education, learning and educational outcomes. And also Government should make more welfare programs and policies to make women self – independent.

Keywords: gender, sensitization, men, women, education, awareness

Introduction

Gender refers to the socio-cultural differences between the males and females in terms of their strength, ability, performance, wage earning capacity and social acceptability etc. In fact the biological process does not discriminate between man and woman, but socially, women are regarded as weak, need protection and hence become subordinate to men (Barodia, 2015) ^[1]. Gender issues mean the discussion on both men and women, though women who suffer from gender inequality. Consideration of gender inequality is now common in government and non-government organizations and in the politics in India (Jha & Nagar, 2015) ^[8]. Further, Bharadwaj (2015) ^[2] cleared that “the women have been discriminated in the country from time unknown. They have been treated in a very unfair manner. It is sad especially since there are in numerous many goddesses worshipped in this country. The country has been striving ever since the independence to protect the women from discrimination.” Although, there are several issues and challenges women are facing, but gender inequality is the most prevailing challenge in the many societies and countries of the world. The discrimination is an immoral, unethical & unfairly behavioural practice of an individual and groups of individual who considered himself/herself or them-selves differently from the others individual or groups of individual.

Gender related issues and challenges in India

India is a country where the most of its citizens have to face the challenges of discrimination right from birth to the end of life due to their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, caste, religion, language, gender, age, health or other status and so on. The Indian Society is still in the process of modernization 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. In many poor (rural) Indian houses males are fed first and the left-overs are eaten by the females. The dropout rate in Schools is much higher in case of girls. The scenario is even more miserable 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. A recent survey highlighted the fact that when young school

boys were asked who should scarified the meal in case it fell short on the table, most replied the mother as the first choice, followed by the sister. Why male members are served meal first, in many homes, and the females members forced to eat what's left?

As a society, we have failed to stimulate thought and debate on this important issue of gender sensitivity. A society can only be progressive when we recognize that it is made up of men and women of equal worth. It's not about who plays what role. Roles can also be important. Roles can have equal relevance. There is no doubt that females are discriminated not only in the womb and childhood, but also at every stage of life. One side women has to play a role of a bread-winner and care taker of her family and another side she has a service provider to her family and society also. She is responsible to accomplish multilateral role in the society as a mother, sister, wife and daughter. Moreover, the women also equally contribute to the country's development just like their male counterpart. But they have to face a numerous challenges and limitations in their day to day life. All these challenges and limitations, restrain them to understand and develop their potentials for their personal growth and freedom to live a better life. The challenges faced by women in Indian context are many like- male dominate society, literacy, domestic violence, stalking, early marriage, women - inequality indecision making, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, dowry violence & bride burring, eve-teasing, female kidnapping, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse, marital rape, sexual harassment at home & work places, unwillingness to engage in the sexual activities, sexual assault, female & women trafficking, physical & mental harassment, family violence, female infanticide, teasing, honour killing, etc. All these malpractices construct many psychiatric disorders and mental illness among the females and that all leads to anti-social behaviour in the society which make women's life more miserable. And it is the matter of shame & disgrace for the Indian society.

In the patriarchal society like India gender bias begins from the birth, women are discriminated in areas like access to nutrition, childcare, education and work. The most painful devaluation of women is the physical and psychological violence that stalks them from cradle to grave. Nature made us complementary, human beings made us unequal. Patriarchy is a social system which considers male superior, gives them more rights and more access to resources and decision making. There is no term or ritual for equal partnership in the family. Women are expected to be subservient to men, leave decision making to men, not to speak out in the public, not to be outspoken especially against men and generally to accept the injustices meted out to them by the system without a fight.

Because boys are socialized to look down upon girls and to view them as inferior and not capable of making decisions or take up challenges, boys carry this attitude in the schools. Traditional roles of women as home makers and men as breadwinners imposed by society have only reinforced the gender imbalance. Besides this, it is evident that children are socialized to behave according to gender stereotypes from a very young age.

According to Shirley Chisholm

The emotional, sexual and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl!". It is also clear however that when children enter a school they are still developing their gender role identity and will continue to do so throughout their education. Schools and homes are the basic sources of development of the understanding of gender and gender relations. The influence of teachers and educators as change agents in this area cannot be underestimated. The broader goal of gender equality is a societal goal to which educational institutions must contribute to.

Gender equity

Gender equity refers to promoting fairness in education, as well as confronting stereotypes and biases that have historically limited a student's potential. When we achieve gender equality, all students will be free to pursue their education without fear of discrimination or harassment because of their gender. Gender equity means respecting all people without discrimination, regardless of their gender. It also means addressing gender inequalities that limit a person's ability to access opportunities to achieve better health, education and economic opportunity based on their gender. Regarding barriers to gender equity in both private and public spheres, women face occupational segregation, and multiple barriers—such as lack of access to land, capital, financial resources and technology, as well as gender-based violence—due to cultural mindsets and stereotypes.

While gender equality is simply focused on providing men and women with the same equal opportunities (like making it legal for women to own land, or even attend school), gender equity works to correct the historical wrongs that have left women behind (such as societal restrictions on employment).

Gender sensitization

Gender Sensitization is a basic requirement to understand the sensitive needs of a particular gender. It helps us to examine our personal attitudes and beliefs and question the 'realities' that we thought we know. The need for this sensitivity has been felt and realised through times immemorial and in almost all kinds of human existence, across the globe. Recent discourses focus upon the need to sensitized gender issues on campus as many believe that education is the catalyst for change.

Gender Sensitization "is about changing behavior and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other gender. It helps people in examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the 'realities' they thought they know" (Aksornkool, Namtip, Joerger, Cindy; Taylor, Elaine (eds.). *Gender sensitivity: a training manual for sensitizing education managers, curriculum and material developers and media professionals to gender concerns*. p. VIII.) Barodia (2015)^[1] described that "gender sensitizing is about changing behaviour 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."

In the other words, gender sensitization is a movement through which the people with stereotype & traditional thinking, should be able to assure equal participation of

women and men in decision-making; to facilitate equally; to equally access & control on the resources; to acquire alike benefits of development; to get equal opportunities in employment; economic, political, cultural & social sector and also can get equivalent regard in all other aspects of their life and livelihood so that both gender can enjoy their human rights without any constraint.

Significance of Gender Sensitization

The increasing intolerance and insensitivity among the people of the present society construct harmful environment for their personal relationships, family members & surroundings. In this regards Barodia, 2015 ^[1] pointed out that “the barrier between men and women are crumbling down and society slowly gets over perennial problem of adjustment between them. With process of gender sensitization men tend to rationalize their behaviour by shedding their egos as far as gender relations are concerned. Instead of complaining or reacting to the behaviour of women men learn to exercise patience and restraint, and take the things in positive way. They will help the women in gaining the importance and recognition at society and domestic sphere when their decision will be taken into account.” The solution of this profound depression requires determined and well-planned strategies. Hence, gender sensitization has become the highly prioritized issue of the day. It is very important to mention here that gender sensitisation is not directly support and assure the sensitivity towards female but it also gives equal preference to both genders. Therefore, not only men should consciousness towards women but women should also have to take care and assure the equality of men in decision-making. It is also essential to women that they should take proper practice of the legal aspects and other privilege of law for equality and justification and not for satisfying their own ego and selfishness. Therefore, there is a great need to sensitize the society on gender issues, as this generally helps to define and ensure equal roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges and expectations of men and women in society.

Gender sensitization: significance of education

Education is a gate way of all values, equality and character. It is a weapon to challenge all gender inequality related to human society and to handle it with the help of education, gender sensitization in educational institutes can create awareness among the children, parents and other members of the community about their roles in future as the men and women in the society. Moreover, this is the power of education that can make a great social change in the society at large. Presently, gender and women studies has become a main subject of study at higher level of education. It is also included in the syllabus of teacher education, so that pupil teacher can learn how to deal with issues related with gender sensitization in a smooth manner. Thus, all the possible concerns should be made by the educational institutions to promote the gender equality in education access, learning process and educational outcomes. As we know that our society is rigid, it is difficult to make changes in the mind-set of the people. Therefore, the government should introduce more welfare programs for women to make them independent. Each Educational institutes, Schools should take initiative to comprehend the gender related issues and to sensitize its' concerned staffs, teachers, students for women equality. And also some relevant

contents should be included in textbook, so that teacher should promote respect for girls and women in the classroom and outside from Schools.

Each educational institutes and school should take initiative to understand the gender related issues and to sensitize its' concerns staffs, teachers, students and society for the women equality. There should be some relevant contents on gender equality in textbooks, teacher should promote the respect to the girls and women in classroom environment and outside from the schools.

Moreover, government should also introduce new programs and also make ensure the proper implementation of policies and strategies that ensuring the gender equality and also control all of the concerns related malpractices towards gender in the society. Stressing on zero tolerance on indecent behavior towards women, Hon'ble MHRD Mr. Pallam Raju while addressing media said that gender sensitization will be made an integral part of the school curriculum.

Role of Family

Our education system needs to be gender sensitive and gender friendly. Schools can play an important role in inculcating gender sensitivity in etiquettes and manners of the students. One of the best possible strategies to minimize gender discrimination in society is to promote gender awareness in parents and teachers. Parents should be advised to treat both their sons and daughters as equals. Instead of telling their daughters to behave properly, mothers should teach their sons to respect all women as equals. It is important that children should grow up seeing women in their homes being respected by the men in the family. All mothers, aunts, grandmothers should stop telling the young girls of their families that they need to learn how to cook, serve the husband and the in-laws, always adjust and let the man get his way, and whatever else say to make a growing girl feel like she has less access to choice or freedom than her male counterpart.

Role of Teachers

Gender issues are prevailing in our society at all levels. To minimize these gender issues we need to start changing the mindset of younger generation as they are those who can bring about further change in society, with their innovative ideas, thoughts and practices. To do this we need good educated teachers who have a sound knowledge regarding gender issues. Teachers play a very important part in the early upbringing of the child and their ideas and beliefs can change the thought processes of young students. Children in the formative years easily nurture values and virtues which are taught at school. Gender sensitization will change the perception that men and women have of each other. It will create a mindset in which men will no longer see women in stereotypical image. They will no longer consider women as weak and unequal entity. Men will see their female counterparts as responsible and equal partners in socio-economic development.

Teachers are important agents of change because of the key role they play in the processes of education as major executors of the teaching and learning processes. A teacher must therefore constantly be aware of the fact that his or her action / attitude / behavior / mindset / outlook will help to shape a child's gender role. He/she may use multiple strategies and interventions to ensure that students have

equal opportunities to both create and obtain their goals. For the teachers to bring about a change in the society they should be given a pre hand knowledge of the issues. Teachers not only need gender sensitive curriculum and textbooks but also gender equality education. Academic contents with lessons on gender sensitivity and moral traditions will unconsciously mould the character of the tender minds. It is time to transform India's patriarchal norms.

Recommendations / suggestions

1. It is necessary that the school curriculum and higher education curriculum should be free of gender inequality.
2. Pictures in textbooks should be gender sensitive to promote gender equality.
3. Education system should be gender friendly and gender sensitive.
4. Gender neutral language should be promoted in the schools at all levels as well as in higher educational institutions.
5. Gender sensitivity training programmes to be made mandatory for all teachers.
6. School parent's partnership should be strengthened to address gender issues at homes.
7. Gender sensitive counseling by gender experts for teachers and students.
8. Gender sensitive, empowered women can serve as role models for girls and pass on new values to all their students.
9. All policies, programs, interventions need to be gender sensitive.
10. Classroom interaction, academic delivery and teaching methodologies should be gender responsive.

Gender issues can be sensitized in higher educational institute's campuses through various activities like debates, discussions, seminars, theatrical performances and other forms of arts. This can also be done through the following means:

a. Gender sensitizing cell

Campuses are filled with active clubs and societies. Having a gender sensitizing cell by students will enable two-way communication and interaction among diverse students with numerous personal incidents. A gender sensitizing cell is not synonymous with women issues or women development cell. This cell should serve as a fundamental platform for all the sexes to discuss problems and come about with solutions.

b. Compulsory courses in the syllabus

Campuses are filled with different courses focusing on various aspects of culture, tradition, arts, moral principles, and lifestyle and so on. Having a compulsory gender course will enable students to think away from the fixed gender discriminatory rules of the society. There is lack of understanding the difference between sex and gender which are two distinct words with different meanings. This difference and the various elements associated with gender studies can be disseminated only through education. Reading the vast literature and origin of the gender issues will enable students to take an informed decision on their thoughts and belief.

c. Gender sensitizing committee

While a cell is composed of students, a gender sensitizing committee including students and teachers will enable communication of problems and other issues faced by students. Such committee will reassure the idea that gender issues are not appreciated and allowed on campuses.

d. Easy redressal procedure

We all know the problems of the issue but getting the solution is the major challenge. Having gender sensitizing cell and committee will not suffice but having easy redressal procedure will complete it. This can be done by having an online portal to file complaints or a register at the principal's office and the cell's and committees.

Having easy redressal procedure will enable students to speak up which is necessary to spread awareness of the issue among their peers.

e. Workshops and discussions

Conducting workshops by various organizations who work in the field enables students to know the reality outside campuses as well. Sessions of debate, discussions, seminars and conferences will help enable spreading awareness about the issue further.

f. Gender issues week

Campuses conduct weeks dedicated to causes. Hence, beginning a week dedicating to talk about gender issues and organizing competitions will keep the spirit of college life alive. Also, it will sensitize these issue among students from different colleges, all across the country.

Photography, article, debate, research papers and other events could be organized to talk about the issue other than classrooms.

g. Annual Production

Societies, viz., dance, drama, theatre, elocution, and music societies have their own production every year. Firstly, to perform a piece on gender issues can gather an audience and attract attention. Moreover, performances attract people, having productions will enable students to know various aspects of the issue and sensitize them over the topic.

Conclusion

Thus it is quite clear that none of the above-mentioned steps is hard to implement. In fact the very idea to have an open mind about these issues by authorities and students together will enable fulfilment of these means to sensitize issues. We can say that in the process of gender equality and gender sensitization, education, teachers and educational institutions play a significance role. According to Barodia (2015) ^[1] that "gender sensitization through education can be as a forceful, effective and primary tool to bring change in the thought process of students through formal school education. The main focus should be on breaking the stereotypes and set patriarchal notions prevalent in the society. The time has come for women to rise up and force the patriarchal society to underline the importance and necessity of the role played by women in cultivating a strong, rational and progressive society." All the possible concerns should be made by the educational institutions to promote the gender equality in education access, learning process and educational outcomes. As we know that our society is rigid, it is difficult to make changes in the mind-set of the people. Therefore, the government should introduce more policies and welfare programs for women to make them independent.

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