

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN INDIAN ACADEMICS - A CRITICAL REVIEW.

Dr. Vani Ramesh

Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Reva University, Bangalore.

Abstract

Gender inequality in India refers to socially constructed differences between men and women in India that systematically empower one group to the detriment of the other. Gender inequalities include unequal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for Indian women and translate to poor health status, educational attainment, and economic status compared to men. Indian constitution guarantees free primary school education for both girls and boys up to the age of 14, but primary education in India is not Universal and often seen as not really necessary for the girls. The girls are considered more to learn on domestic chores. Another disincentive for sending daughters to school is, when schools are located at a distance, when teachers are male, and when girls are expected to study along with boys, parents are often unwilling to expose their daughters resulting lowest female literacy rates in India.

The other factor to be taken into account is that are there enough opportunities for girls to achieve their full potential in the way boys do in the education system. Often there are unrecognised, unintended and unknown biases in the minds of the teachers, administrators and peers in schools, which inhibit girls. For girls in rural areas and from deprived castes, communities and tribes and for handicapped girls, all the above problems are accentuated much more than in the case of boys because of dual or multiple disadvantages. It is well-known that two thirds or more of our women are illiterate and less than half of them are educated up to the primary level. We have to also note that all-India figures hide a lot of variations as between States.

Index Terms: *Teachers, Gender Inequalities, Social Change, Literacy, Capacity Building, Civil Rights.*

Introduction

WOMEN CONTINUE TO FACE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THIS “POST CIVIL RIGHTS ERA” BUT IT DOES NOT OPERATE THROUGH THE KINDS OF OVERT BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION THAT MOBILIZED ACTIVISTS IN THE 1960s; IT IS EMBEDDED IN THE FABRIC OF EVERYDAY INTERACTION.

The influence of teachers and educators on gender roles of their students immensely impacts their educational outcomes as well as their roles in contemporary society. Despite gains in economic development, India performs poorly on global measures of gender inequality and in 2012, fell behind all other Asian countries except Afghanistan on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, ranking 132nd out of 148 countries. As such, it has been deemed 'One of the worst countries for women' by the Times of India. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled. Since then, India has improved its rankings on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI) to 105/136 in 2013. Women in India are at a particular disadvantage due to gender based violence and limited access to resources. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike. Some argue that some gender equality measures, place men at a disadvantage. However, when India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantage in several important ways.

All institutions of society exhibit this gender disparity as gender is rarely thought to be important and hardly understood and addressed. Such behaviours and attitudes especially in educational institutions and academic settings are a further set back to gender equity and equality concerns thereby promoting gender based discrimination in the overall processes and performance of educational institutions. Women throughout the world face a range of challenges, levels of education, health care, political representation and discrimination and sexual

violence are all too frequent. One of the most prominent cases of a country struggling with the competing dynamics of development, modernization, religion and tradition.

“Teachers and educators influence the gender roles of their students thus impacting their educational outcomes. When considering Education for All (EFA) goal 5, which aimed to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and now aims to achieve gender equality by 2015, it should be realized that teachers are a critical force for meeting the goal” as in. Educationists, academicians and faculty greatly influence gender socialization and mould gender roles of students, thus having impact on quality of life and power distribution. Since we are concerned how teachers act as change agents on prevailing gender issues in contemporary society, it is essential that the concept of gender and its sensitization be further clarified for our understanding. “Gender is determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. Each society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender” as in.

Moreover in “Reference World Health Organization stresses, Gender is used to describe those characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles”. Furthermore “Reference suggests, Gender is the division of people into two categories, “men” and “women.” Through interaction with caretakers, socialization in childhood, peer pressure in adolescence, and gendered work and family roles women and men are socially constructed to be different in behavior, attitudes, and emotions. The gendered social order is based on and maintains these differences”. In addition “Gender relations refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society” as in . Besides this “It is evident that children are socialized to behave according to gender stereotypes from a very young age. It is also clear however that when a child enters school he or she is still developing their gender role identity and will continue to do so.

Theoretical Review

The gender discrimination in schools is an extension of what we think in the family, in society and in the community in which we live. Unless there is camaraderie, dignity and partnership among the members of and within the family, it is difficult to expect the school to create it artificially in the school environment, and to pursue it without reference to what is happening in society. There has to be a democratic environment in the home for the child to be democratic in his/her lifestyle. Any programme of gender discrimination elimination in educational institutions must take into confidence, the parents and guardians and undoubtedly the teachers (both men and women), for whom there must be continuous programmes orienting them to equality in thought and deed. Persons in the community and the media have to be involved, for the programme touches the lives of children outside of schools. It cannot succeed if pursued in the school alone. The total number of girl students enrolled in the upper primary education are much better because of many policy interventions on behalf of the girl child, such as the Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1958-9), the Kothari Commission Report (1964-5) and above all the National Policy (1968) and the National Policy on Education (1986), which stressed the need for empowering women, that is making them capable of guiding their own destiny and becoming self-reliant through exposure to education and survival skills, including income generation.

The Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the United Nations (UNESCO) stated that ‘*education should be a means to empower children and adults alike to become active participants in the transformation of their societies. Learning should also focus on the values, attitudes and behaviours which enable individuals to learn to live together in a world characterized by diversity and pluralism*’ (UNESCO, internet 2006). In this regard the function of schools as educational institutions and the responsibility of teachers became key factors in the development of students and pupils, empowering and enabling them to develop their skills, interests and

individuals potential. Houston (1996) puts particular stress on the status of teachers and states that 'schools can never be more effective than their quality of their teachers' (Houston, 1996: ix). However the quality of a teacher is founded not on intuition and experience (Leavitt, 1992) but above all on high quality education.

The DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) is a special programme of the Government of India run in 42 districts in seven States, to increase enrolment of girls at the primary level and helping in sustaining it. It has, as one of its thrusts, the elimination of gender discrimination in the schools in its jurisdiction. In fact, there is a substantial gender focus in it. The decentralised implementation it envisages, provides for specific interventions for girls. Programme goals include concentrated effort on reduction of gender disparities in education, as reflected in lower enrolment, retention and achievement of girls, particularly those from socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Rightly does it emphasise the role of the community in helping the school to combat sex stereotyping. It encourages local communities, particularly women to play an active role in every aspect of the programme. This includes intensive capacity building for groups in the community to focus on issues relating to the education of girls and boys. Involvement of the community is also required in monitoring enrolment, retention and levels of achievement and classroom behaviour and transaction, with emphasis on girls. The equal treatment promoted in the schools ought to be able to transform the thinking within families.

In many States there is mid-day meal scheme, which is intended to attract children of the poorer sections to enrol in schools. And only women are recruited as primary school teachers. Most States has attempted attracting girls to enrol in schools, by making education free for all girls right up to the professional stage. This however has the catch that even those girls coming from families who can afford to pay, get free education. We here recall the instance of a Centre run in the Jama Masjid area by the Central Social Welfare Board many years ago, for girl dropouts who, through a 'condensed course', could appear for the school final exam leading to a matriculation degree. For such centres, there were two criteria — the students had to be girls from poor families. The girls who attended this centre, could afford to pay, so they would not normally be entitled to come to the centre. But they pleaded that the centre should not be closed down. The reason that they gave is something very important, they said that their culture and community would not allow them to attend regular schools, once they had attained puberty. They wanted to study and if they were given a chance to finish school studies here, it would be a boon not only to them but also to their girl children, who might have the chance to go to school and be educated! The centre was allowed to continue on their request.

What has not happened in many States is that schools have not come up in abundance or in convenient locations in rural communities. If they have, then some of them do not pay attention to conveniences that the girl students require and the timings most convenient for rural girls who have to mind the household and other kids in the family. Again, the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India had recommended that schools should have a day care centre attached to them — the advantages are very clear — girl children can attend schools while their younger sisters and brothers are looked after close by in the day care centre of the school and secondly, all children, girls and boys in the school, can be given training in child care in the centre — so that the stereo typing that children must be cared for only by the females in the family, would go. No one seems to have taken this seriously till date.

Within the school itself, there is need to identify the overt and covert discrimination, arising out of ignorance and deeply ingrained ways of thinking, on the part of teachers and educational administrators. This manifests itself in language, gesture, posture and action as seen in the way girls and boys are seated in the classroom. We neither need to exceed the limits of decency nor need we show prudery — again it is for teachers and the administrators in schools to ensure that girls and boys are comfortable in each other's company. Quite often more chances are given to boys than to girls (by a kind of reflex action) to answer questions or to take on responsibility. Girls keep away from sports and physical activity and nothing is done to see that they are talked out of this preference by providing some transport or other facilities for getting home safe and encouraging them to take part in all the games and fitness programmes of the school. In fact, it should be advocated that self-defence should be

compulsorily taught from an early stage for all children, particularly girls, in order to build confidence in them selves.

For many girls from poor families, the biggest problem is that of self-image, which is hardly thought of as a problem by their parents, who may also not have a good self-image (and anyway, the view may be — how can girls feel so for they are born only to bear children and look after them). Even in developed countries, there are problems amongst teenagers entering the adolescent stage, as is but natural all the world over, for at this stage of growing up, when suddenly they have to restrict themselves, girls consider being girls as 'unlucky'. For a girl, the passage into adolescence is not just marked by menarche or a few new curves. It is marked by a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities, especially in math and science. It is marked by a scathingly critical attitude toward her body, and a blossoming sense of inadequacy.' If it is like this in an advanced country with plenty of opportunities for girls and boys, we can imagine the situation in our country, where female infanticide is still practised in certain parts.

Most studies show that, on average, girls do better in school than boys. Girls get higher grades and complete high school at a higher rate compared to boys (Jacobs, 2002). Standardized achievement tests also show that females are better at spelling and perform better on tests of literacy, writing, and general knowledge (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). An international aptitude test administered to fourth graders in 35 countries, for example, showed that females outscored males on reading literacy in every country. Although there were no differences between boys and girls in fourth grade on mathematics, boys began to perform better than girls on science tests in fourth grade (International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement, n.d.). Girls continue to exhibit higher verbal ability throughout high school, but they begin to lose ground to boys after fourth grade on tests of both mathematical and science ability. These gender differences in math and science achievement have implications for girls' future careers and have been a source of concern for educators everywhere.

During the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to find out why there is a shortage of women in the science, math, engineering, and technical fields (AAUW, 1992). In 1995, 22% of America's scientists and engineers were women, compared to half of the social scientists. Women who do pursue careers in science, engineering, and mathematics most often choose fields in the biological sciences, where they represent 40% of the workforce, with smaller percentages found in mathematics or computer science (33%), the physical sciences (22%), and engineering (9%) (National Science Board, 1998). Part of the explanation can be traced to gender differences in the cognitive abilities of middle-school students. In late elementary school, females outperform males on several verbal skills tasks: verbal reasoning, verbal fluency, comprehension, and understanding logical relations (Hedges & Nowell, 1995). Males, on the other hand, outperform females on spatial skills tasks such as mental rotation, spatial perception, and spatial visualization (Voyer, Voyer, & Bryden, 1995). Males also perform better on mathematical achievement tests than females. However, gender differences do not apply to all aspects of mathematical skill. Males and females do equally well in basic math knowledge, and girls actually have better computational skills. Performance in mathematical reasoning and geometry shows the greatest difference (Fennema, Sowder, & Carpenter, 1999). Males also display greater confidence in their math skills, which is a strong predictor of math performance (Casey, Nuttall, & Pezaris, 2001).

The poorer mathematical reasoning skills exhibited by many female adolescents have several educational implications. Beginning at age 12, girls begin to like math and science less and to like language arts and social studies more than do boys (Kahle & Lakes, 2003; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). They also do not expect to do as well in these subjects and attribute their failures to lack of ability (Eccles, Barber, Jozefowicz, Malenchuk, & Vida, 1999). By high school, girls self-select out of higher-level, "academic-track" math and science courses, such as calculus and chemistry. One of the long-term consequences of these choices is that girls lack the prerequisite high school math and science courses necessary to pursue certain majors in college (e.g., engineering, computer

science). Consequently, the number of women who pursue advanced degrees in these fields is significantly reduced (Halpern, 2004).

Some researchers, on the one hand, argue that the gender gap in mathematics is biologically driven. Selected research shows that prenatal hormones circulating in the brain encourage differential development in the hemispheres of male and female fetuses (Berenbaum, Korman, & Leveroni, 1995). Others believe intelligence has its roots in genetics (Plomin, 2000). There is evidence, however, that sociocultural factors may influence girls' attitudes toward math and science. For example, parents tend to view math as more important for sons and language arts and social studies as more important for daughters (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers, 1999). Parents are more likely to encourage their sons to take advanced high school courses in chemistry, mathematics, and physics and have higher expectations for their success (Wigfield, Battle, Keller, & Eccles, 2002).

Teacher characteristics and the classroom environment also have been identified as contributors to this gender gap. Seventh and eighth graders attending math and science camps identified a math or science teacher as "a person who has made math, science, or engineering interesting" for them (Gilbert, 1996, p. 491). Unfortunately, many females report being passed over in classroom discussions, not encouraged by the teacher, and made to feel stupid (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Classroom environments can be made to feel more "girl-friendly" by incorporating,

- Low levels of competition, public drill, and practice
- High levels of teacher attention
- Hands-on activities
- Female role models
- Same-sex cooperative learning communities
- Non sexist books and materials (Evans, Whigham, & Wang, 1995)

At a recent conference in Trivandrum in December 2000, a new agenda for women's education was talked about. It was felt that there are not many women at top levels of educational policy and administration, even though 'teaching' is considered a 'female' profession and this is a great drawback as women's perceptions and perspectives are needed for formulating the agenda based on the experience of women's education in India. You cannot think of education in isolation of what is to be done for raising the level of women's progress. The theme of the Beijing conference was "Look at things through women's eyes". Let us add the word "also" at the end of it.

India is on target to meet its Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education by 2015 UNICEF's measure of attendance rate and Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) capture the quality of education.

Despite some gains, India needs to triple its rate of improvement to reach GEEI score of 95% by 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals. In rural India girls continue to be less educated than the boys. According to a 1998 report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum (majority of the female characters being depicted as weak and helpless vs. strong, adventurous, and intelligent men with high prestige jobs).

Though it is gradually rising, the female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. According to Census of India 2011, literacy rate of females is 65.46% compared to males which are 82.14%. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. According to majority of the scholars, the major factor behind the improved social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy. From 2006-2010, the percent of females who completed at least a secondary education was almost half that of men, 26,6% compared to 50.4%.¹ In the current generation of youth, the gap seems to be closing at the primary level and increasing in the secondary level. In rural Punjab, the gap between girls and boys

in school enrolment increases dramatically with age as demonstrated in National Family Health Survey-3 where girls age 15-17 in Punjab are 10% more likely than boys to drop out of school. Although this gap has been reduced significantly, problems still remain in the quality of education for girls where boys in the same family will be sent to higher quality private schools and girls sent to the government school in the village.

Under Non-Formal Education programme, about 40% of the centres in states and 10% of the centres in UTs are exclusively reserved for females. As of 2000, about 0.3 million NFE centres were catering to about 7.42 million children, out of which about 0.12 million were exclusively for girls. Certain state level engineering, medical and other colleges like in Orissa have reserved 30% of their seats for females. The Prime Minister of India and the Planning Commission also vetoed a proposal to set up an Indian Institute of Technology exclusively for females. Although India had witnessed substantial improvements in female literacy and enrolment rate since the 1990s, the quality of education for female remains to be heavily compromised as the country continues to hold greater value for male than female. These reasons also result in high dropout rates at (upper) primary stage. So there is a gap in retention of girls in schools, even if they enrol at the primary stage. In many places in the rural areas where there are primary schools, there is no scope for studying further as there are no schools having upper primary and secondary sections and girls are not sent to far away schools because of this. Fear of the girl child's vulnerability is often the only reason given.

Recommendations

Gender issues are prevailing in society in all areas of life. To minimize these gender issues we need to start changing the mindsets of the younger generation of society 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. It has been observed that teachers reinforce gender roles also in the different expectations that they have for boys and girls in their classes. "Teachers may also create learning environment in which boys are encouraged to succeed while girls are allowed to fail. In extreme cases.....What's more, many teachers may be completely unaware that they treat girls and boys differently. But none of these habits, when they occur, should be surprising. We all grow up among the influence of our family and cultures, and as teachers, we may see ourselves, rightly, in the role of instilling cultural values in the children in our classes" as in . Teachers play a very important part in the early upbringing of the child and their ideas and beliefs can change the thought patterns of young students. A teacher must therefore constantly be aware of the fact that disorder actions/attitude/behavior/perspective/approach/manner/outlook/mind-set 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. Studies have shown gender differences to have a direct relationship to preferential treatment, classroom dynamics and academic success. Teachers are required to be serious about the gender issue. For the teachers to bring about a change in the society they should be given pre hand knowledge over the issue. Teachers need not only gender sensitive curricula and textbooks but also gender equality education. Teachers can serve as role models for the students.

The shift in paradigm we have outlined requires us to rethink our strategies for bringing about institutional change if we are to ensure the effective participation of highly trained women and minority scholars in the academy. It is necessary but insufficient to challenge intentional forms of discrimination. Gender and racial schemas are internalized by everyone and often operate despite good intentions on the part of individuals. It follows that familiar dynamics of blame that turn on accusations of discriminatory intent are counterproductive. As Valian argues, everyone is liable to make errors in judgment as a consequence of the gender schemas they have internalized; what they should be held accountable for is the failure to scrutinize their judgments critically and take steps, personally and institutionally, to counteract these errors. It also follows that institutional change will require many different types of intervention. The arguments that will raise awareness about these subtle forms of discriminatory practice and the strategies that will be effective in changing them will vary widely depending on context and institutional actors. That said, a recent comparative assessment of strategies for promoting diversity in

corporate contexts offers some instructive lessons for academia. Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly find that the most effective interventions are those that establish a specialized position or committee whose primary responsibility is to make institutional change (2006: 590-591): “[S]tructures that embed accountability, authority, and expertise” have much more impact than programs aimed at reducing managerial bias (by means of training and evaluation) or counteracting the social isolation of women and minorities (mentoring and networking), and they enhance the effectiveness of these latter two types of strategy (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2006: 661). The following are recommendations for leaders and decision makers within colleges and universities, and for the professional organizations that crosscut these institutions.

References

1. N. Kabeer, & R. Subrahmanian, (1996) ‘Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender-Aware Planning,’ in IDS Discussion Paper, No. 357, IDS, Brighton.
2. Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all 2005 UNESCO retrieved on October 15, 2009 International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology, Vol. 1, No. 4, October 2010 ISSN: 2010-0248 348.
3. H. Biber, S. and Carger, G. L., 2000, p. 91. Working women in America: Split dreams. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). (2000) An IFAD approach to: Gender mainstreaming: The experience of the Latin America and the Caribbean division. Rome, Italy: U. Quintily S.p. A. 8. E. Kane Gender, Culture, and Learning, 1996
5. S. Stacki Women Teachers Empowered In India: Teacher Training Through A Gender Lens. Executive summary 2002.
6. A. Woolfolk, P. Winne and N. Perry (2006). Educational Psychology, Third Canadian Edition. Toronto, ON: Pearson Education, Inc., 176.
7. D. Sadker & K. Zittleman. (2003) Teacher Education Textbooks: The Unfinished Gender Revolution [Electronic version]. Educational Leadership.
8. The Economic and Social Council Report for 1997, United Nations, 1997.
9. EQUATE. (2008b). *Gender equality framework*. Washington, DC: Management.
10. Systems International. Available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/pubs/EQUATE_Gender Equality Framework May08.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/pubs/EQUATE_Gender_Equality_Framework_May08.pdf) .
11. Subrahmanian, R. (n.d.). *Gender equality in education: Definitions and measurements* (Background paper for UNESCO GMR 2003-043).
12. Tietjen, K. (1991). *Educating Girls: Strategies to Increase Access, Persistence, and Achievement*. C. Prather (Ed.). Washington, DC: Advancing Basic Education and Literacy (ABEL) Project/ Creative Associates International Inc.
13. **Websites**
 - a. <http://www.eurotreaties.com/maastrichtec.pdf>.
 - b. http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/index_en.htm.
 - c. <http://portal.unesco.org>.
 - d. <http://www.coe.int>.
 - e. <http://www.semog.de/wir/selbstver/gender/gender.htm>.
 - f. http://www.adb.org/Documents/Manuals/Gender_Checklists.