UNIT 2 GENDER AND EDUCATION

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you read about how gender impacts institution of family and marriage. In this unit we shall discuss how gender has been viewed with respect to education in the Indian context. Key ideas related to schooling, empowerment and the nation are unpacked to demonstrate the critical importance of gender in influencing the aims and outcomes in the educational arena. This section also provides a frame work to enable you to analyze education from a feminist perspective by incorporating feminist principles and concepts to facilitate your understanding.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will able to:

- Understand the relationship between gender and education;
- Review how educational policies have incorporated gender;
• Build an understanding about a feminist perspective on Education; and
• Employ feminist concepts and principals to analyze educational content and pedagogy.

2.3 GENDER AND EDUCATION

This section is divided into two parts covering two different domains of Education. The first part looks at aims of schooling women, where we open up the question of why education for women is considered necessary. This is done both in the context of the nineteenth century and in post independent India.

In the second part we look at the questions that a feminist critique opens up in the domain of knowledge and curriculum. What is identified as worth knowing or teaching in Education? This is an issue that is deeply connected with both gender and other categories of caste and class. This will be undertaken through an analysis of textbooks and pedagogic practices.

2.3.1 Aims of Schooling Women

The issue of gender and education needs to be understood within a framework. We invariably discuss this issue either through talking about getting girls to school or through expressing our concern for low literacy levels among women etc. A powerful argument for educating women and girls emerges from the benefits it will provide to the family and to national development. Educated women will produce fewer children, educate them, teach them at home, be more aware of health and sanitation and will possibly get their children inoculated. While these are the desired outcomes of women’s education, it does not provide us with a framework from which to understand the links between gender and education.

A framework is critical to unpack both these areas. The 19th century provides us rich insights into how we can develop this framework. The questions that need to be posed are: What are the possibilities that education creates? What kind of education is required for women and men? And, why?

In case of men, this question is easily answered. It was in the colonial period set out in Macaulay’s time where education was to create men who were “brown in colour, but white on the inside”. This implies that education was not only meant to train and skill local men to carry on work for the English in India, but rather its purpose was that they even think like the British. An outcome of modern education was that the educated Indian male underwent a transformation where his way of living and thinking changed, his expectations from his own family and community also were different. Relations within the home too underwent turmoil as men increasingly felt
that they could not continue to live in older, more traditional arrangements. Traditionally, women were seen as partners who played a role in reproduction and the performance of rituals in the family. Now the expectations from a wife were different. Her behavior, her interaction with the husband and her very nature had to undergo a change for the educated male to see her as worthy of him. We can see that expressed in the quotes given below:

‘Look at the picture of a woman who delights the heart of a man who overpowers him by her pure love: observe her traits: she walks gently, she speaks only melodious words. She is both mild and guileless. She neither sits idly nor wanders here or there. She neither eats nor drinks like a glutton, but like a temperate woman. By her good and amiable disposition her smiling face is suffused with love. From her lips only kind and affectionate words come out as from good trees we get only fragrant flowers and sweet fruits. She carries out all her husband’s wishes and passes her time peacefully and happily. In all her work she uses her god given intelligence and tries to remain virtuous in all her deeds. Her heart is fully virtuous and the perennial spring of ardent love ever flows from it’.

The disappointment of the men whose expectation from wives remained unfulfilled was also eloquently expressed:

Where is the Hindustani, wise and pure who can quote Shakuntala and the Merchant of Venice, play the Sitar or Sarangi and sing divinely? Every educated Hindu would like to have such a Kumud [the heroine of the famous nineteenth century Gujarati novel Saraswati Chandra by Goverdhan Das Tripathi], such a lovely maiden for his wife. But where are these phantoms of delight in Hindu society? They exist in the brains of those who have read Kalidas and Shakespeare, but otherwise we know them not (anonymous Hindu male, 1884).

This new woman had to be created by men and it is in this context that schooling of women, or education for women needs to be understood. It was schooling of the new companionate wife that reformers were keen on. A companionate wife was one who could talk, interact and engage with her husband, who could manage and run her home and the family with new cultural practices. She was in a sense a creation of upper caste reformers. Thus, a new kind of “Bhadra mahila” had to be created.

An example of this process of schooling is evident in the case of Ramabai Ranade, wife of the well-known Maharashtrian reformer M.G. Ranade. M.G. Ranade was a member of the Prarthana Samaj and active in the crusade for widow remarriage. At the age of 31 years he lost his first wife and was married to 11 year old Ramabai. The great difference in age put the young wife in the ‘authority’ and ‘awe’ of the husband and this was an important
aspect of schooling. Schooling women to be good wives and ultimately intelligent partners was the role that education was to play.

**Box 2.1**

Most of us know schooling to be the process by which people (children, normally) learn. This could be in formal or mainstream institutions - school spaces - or non formal or alternative spaces for learning, religious schools, schools for learning particular skills or vocations. Schooling therefore takes on the meaning of a structured process of learning, where some people impart knowledge to others (that is, teachers to learners). There is a certain hierarchy maintained and relationships of authority and power involved in this process. In addition, the space of the school serves to create an atmosphere where learners are disciplined into following certain rules or norms, and are punished or excluded if these rules are broken. Schools and the process of schooling becomes one site on which certain dominant ideas - political, social, cultural, economic ideas - in society are communicated to learners, through interactions between teachers and learners, or between learners, or from textbooks. Schooling becomes a process by which the ‘ideal’ subject can be modeled. For example, in our textbooks we see and learn about healthy, fit boys who are patriotic, respectful of parents, who will take on professions that will further the development of the Indian nation. The process of schooling reflects the social relationship of power which exists in society as a whole, and does not encourage questioning of these relationships. However, through schooling, learners also see how they can move between different positions of power. Learners may not always be less powerful than teachers for example - a high class boy in a wheelchair may be laughed at by other boys from less well-to-do background; male students may be able to bully female teachers, or Dalit boys may often tease Brahmin girls.

In the context of gender, schooling needs to be understood on a much larger canvas than actual, formal institutions of learning - schools, training institutes, universities etc. For women and girls the domain where schooling occurs is also the home, through religious and social forums etc. For instance religious texts set out stridharma or the idea of the “pativrata” among Hindu’s for women to emulate and fashion themselves accordingly. During the 19th century considerable space in local newspapers was given to debates on what kinds of sari and blouse, ‘Bhadra’ (civilized/upper class) women should wear. These are also significant sites where women and girls are schooled into existing norms and values. Today ‘media’ is an important site for schooling.
That Ramabai’s interest in the educational agenda began and survived only as a way of ‘pleasing’ Ranade is evident from her account of its various stages. After about two months of personally devoting attention to Ramabai’s elementary education and unable to devote more than a couple of hours to her education at night, Ranade decided to provide her with a female teacher who would come in during the day and take her through a school curriculum. Since she was still a child in many ways and not enthusiastic about acquiring learning for its own sake, Ramabai’s ‘schooling’ immediately ran into trouble. She writes: “And that was the end of everything. Who was going to listen to that teacher? More than half an hour would be spent in looking for the books and slate. The teacher was also a young thing. How could she control me?” (Ranade, 1910)

Six months later Ranade discovered that Ramabai had made no progress beyond what he had originally taught her. When he upbraided the teacher for failing in her responsibilities she flashed back angrily that all labour was wasted upon Ramabai anyway since she lacked the necessary discipline to learn anything, being a rustic. The teacher also handed in her notice and quit. A thoroughly chastened Ramabai burst into tears at the sight of a humiliated Ranade who merely picked up a book and began to read without saying a word to her. Sobered by the event, Ramabai applied herself with more diligence and later offered of her own accord to learn English but continued to tie her learning skills to Ranade’s approving presence. Many years later when they were residing in Bengal and he wished her to learn Bengali she remarked that she would do so only if he taught her. Ramabai’s ‘schooling’ extended beyond the formal educational processes. To be the companionate wife of a prominent public figure she had to learn to share his interests and identify with his activities. Significantly, however, throughout Ramabai’s recounting of the activities she shared with Ranade her own enthusiasm for or investment in the issues is never dwelt upon: they are always described as things Ranade suggested or wished her to do.

Fairly early on in the ‘companionate’ stage of their marriage, when Ramabai had just graduated to adulthood, she once, and only once, acted on her own in an attempt to seek the approval of the women in Ranade’s family as well as the ‘orthodox’ women of the community. The incident related to Ramabai’s accompanying Ranade to a public session where a woman, Annapurnabai, rendered Puranic stories to a mixed audience. Among those attending the session was Pandita Ramabai, a thoroughly ‘disreputable’ character in the eyes of the orthodox, including Ramabai Ranade’s female kin. Some of the orthodox women maneuvered to make the ‘reformist’ women sit along with men since they were perceived to be fraternizing with them anyway. Caught between her husband’s desire for the conjugal couple to go to public meetings together and the disapproval of the womenfolk, Ramabai Ranade pleaded a headache and returned home rather than be publicly ostracized by the orthodox women.
When Ranade returned home and caught Ramabai out in her lie the matter became a severe test of their relationship. As Ramabai recalls the event, the meaning of ‘schooling’ and the strategies a husband conventionally had recourse to, without using violence, become clear. Ranade communicated his severe disapproval by punishing Ramabai with a studied silence. As Ramabai massaged his feet at night (as usual) she suddenly noticed his rejection of her presence.

‘I felt sleepy as I sat there massaging his feet. When I realized that he was only pretending to sleep and that there was no chance of his talking to me I became miserable. I wept for a long time. Never before had he done this. If I had done something wrong I would beg forgiveness. But [this time] I could not utter a word. The heart may grow all humble; but one’s proud nature still resists supplication [emphasis added]. I thought of all this a thousand times but still could not say a word... The whole night passed like this. Neither of us could sleep. When dawn broke he got up and went out. I could not bear such punishment and broke down in tears...’. (Ranade, 1910)

Finally a chastened Ramabai begged forgiveness and promised never to do such a thing again. Ranade was silent for a while and then said:

‘You do something silly to begin with and then get agitated. It upsets me too. Can one be happy to see one’s dear behave contrary to one’s inclination [emphasis added]. Once the direction is clear you should keep to it firmly. Please don’t do this again’. (Ranade, 1910)

Ramabai immediately resolved never to do anything against her husband’s wishes. In her own words, “I felt that there could be no greater punishment than this refusal to speak to me. And throughout the rest of my life I never gave occasion for such punishment again.” (Ranade, 1910) She was 21 at the time this incident occurred and had been married to Ranade for 10 years - long enough to realize the place of ‘disapproval’ in their relationship. It is evident that the general ideological direction was continuously reiterated by those in charge of schooling women. The guiding hand made clear that certain forms of activity were given the official seal of approval; others were placed beyond the pale.

The examples given above from one individual women’s life would have given you an idea about the changing perspectives towards women’s schooling and education in 19th Century. In the next section, let us turn our attention to the larger questions linking gender, nation and education.
2.3.2 Nation, Education and Gender

Nation is another key concept, in addition to schooling, that needs to inform our analysis of gender and education. From the 19th century as we moved to a modern system of education, we also responded to the colonial rule through building an identity for ‘ourselves’ - as a nation. The nationalist movement was intertwined with important social-reform movements, which were a response to the challenges posed by the British. Issues such as abolition of Sati, promotion of widow-remarriage and child-marriage became part of efforts by reformers to address what was seen to be regressive in Indian culture and society. At the same time women’s education came to occupy a central place in efforts to reform women’s situation. Schools opened in large numbers for girls in Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu through different societies.

If we look at one such well-known movement more closely, we will be able to understand the importance of the connection between Nation, Education and Gender. The Arya Samaj, initiated by Dayanand Saraswati, in Punjab was an important movement that spread to other parts of North India. Dayanand’s response to the reasons that the British attributed to India’s lack of development and progress, was to go back to the authority of the Vedas. The depressed condition of women, that the British drew on constantly to symbolize India’s ‘backwardness’ was responded to by Arya Samaj through arguing that the core of Hinduism was progressive and held both sexes to be equal. It was corruption, superstition and the move away from the authority of the Vedas that had resulted in people following practices that were not part of our Vedic tradition. Therefore Arya Samaj efforts were to

a) revive Vedic practices
b) remove superstitions and other rituals that were seen to be regressive
c) promote education of women and girls.

It is critical to understand is the role that Arya Samaj visioned through education for women. Dayanand’s writings indicate that he was not interested in women as individuals but more in terms of their role as wives and mothers. His argument was that Hindu women were key to producing ‘healthy’ children for their families and for the community and finally for the Nation. He states that all men and women (i.e., the whole mankind) have a right to study. An ignorant wife would not be able to participate equally in performing her social and religious duties. In the same contexts he says that if the husband is well-educated and the wife ignorant or vice-versa, there will be constant state of warfare in the house. Their role of bringing up children, managing the home and behaviour with family and relatives would be inappropriate. Marriage and procreation were seen as the primary duty of woman.
Nation, gender and education are part of a mutually interacting conceptual triad, and therefore Nation is a key category that needs to inform how we understand the gender and education link. National education systems as they exist in the modern state play an important role in the communication of ideals and values. By introducing common standards across large number of learners and systems that are applicable to all - be it common syllabi, textbooks, examination systems, uniforms - the education system reaches out to a vast population. And therefore, influences the way they think. Policy documents time and again have placed ‘national identity’, the building of ‘national character’ and ‘patriotism’ amongst their core concerns. A significant goal that national education systems then set out for themselves is the inculcation of national character in children through school—what will enable them to become ideal citizens.

Schooling is overwhelmingly determined by nationalistic concerns and anxieties. And at different moments in time the needs of the nation can define the educational agenda differently. Gender is central to this process because, for historical and other reasons, it is the site where nationalism, defines itself. Women are the bearers of a nation’s identity. They are key to defining how the Indian nation is different from the American or Japanese nation. It is through the instrument of education that they are inducted to assume that role. Gender socialisation is mediated through the school, which is a key arena for the creation and normalisation of these specific sets of values, norms and ideals. The school sets out the notion of the ideal citizen, the ideal woman, the ideal family, the ideal worker, and so on.

That this schooling of women needed to be carefully monitored and managed is evident in the intense debates that took place in the public sphere as to what women should be taught. What is interesting is that there was concurrence between liberal - progressive reformers and the more conservative groups on certain key aspects related to women’s education.

Both sides agreed that absence of education amongst women - regardless of what might have historically contributed to such a situation was a sign of India’s lack of civilization, an indicator of its low position in the evolutionary spiral that was history. The conclusion was clear that if India had to catch up with the west in terms of its material achievements, then the nation’s women had to be urgently educated. At the same time, this education could not be left to the alien colonial rulers or the missionaries. Because, if in the process of being educated, the ‘Indian’ women refashioned
herself in the image of the white, western woman, then it could create a new crisis of identity for native society or the emerging Indian nation. The debate is easily summed up: there was a resounding ‘yes’ to women’s education but an equally emphatic ‘no’ to unregulated, western education and culture.

The anxiety about the content of education was not just in terms of threat to native identity. It was also powered by fears of how modern ideas of equality and reason questioned the existing social order and its hierarchies of power - be it caste, ethnicity or gender. Not surprisingly, there was an increasing preoccupation with defining the kind of education that would be suitable for Indian women.

Mahratta comment on the Female High School in Bombay in states 1887

“Nothing can be gained by anglicizing our girls or teaching them to ape the ways of men.” Schools must not create an “aversion to our domestic life”. It was ‘most reprehensible’ that lessons inculcating the “high principles of ancient Aryan religious morality” were conspicuously absent from the girls’ curriculum” and so was “advise to young women with regard to chaste wifely conduct.” (Bhog, 2002)

The tone of the Mahratta was not exceptional. The most celebrated ‘progressive’ face of Indian nationalism in the late 19th century, Dadabhai Naoroji, voiced the same anxieties in a more sophisticated way: “The time will come when natives generally will see the benefit of female education as a great social necessity to rise in civilization and to advance social happiness and progress; and will understand that women had as much right to exercise and enjoy all the rights, privileges, and duties of this world as man, each working towards the common good in her or his respective sphere. But that time has not come yet... Good and educated mothers only will raise good and educated sons”. (Bhog, 2002)

In 1916, K.B. V. Krishna Rao, a zamindar of Cocanada, wrote, “The education of girls requires to be improved in various directions to suit the conditions of the various classes of girls and make them well equipped to as to enable them to become good housewives and good mothers... it would not be wise to impart such kind of education as would implant in them tastes which they would have no opportunity of gratifying in their after life (sic)”. (Bhog 2002)

Therefore, we can see that women’s education was not so much an end as it was a mean to an end - the betterment of the family and the nation. While Naoroji does mention that women have the right to enjoy all the rights available to men, there is no mistaking the familiar note of women raising sons for the nation. Nor can one ignore the fear regarding “anglicized” Indian women discarding their own culture and tradition and moving towards acquiring ‘tastes’ that Indian men will be unable to fulfill.
What modern education potentially created for women lead to fears that were rarely a subject of debate in the case of men? Therefore this threat informed the new nationalists who were constantly trying to define and distinguish an oriental from the western women. As Ram Mohan Roy’s had put it nearly half a century ago: Hindu women were “infinitely more self-sacrificing than men”, and their “exemplifying wifely devotion and spiritual strength” was their distinguishing feature as oriental women. (Bhog, 2002)

Therefore, the core of patriarchy remained intact with the idea of the Indian ‘Pativrata’ being transformed partly to suit new emergent and aspirations of men and society. Education was the instrument through which this was to be fashioned

2.4 REVIEW OF POLICIES

Let us now take the two concepts, that of schooling and nation, to unpack policies in post-independent India. The two extracts given in the next section from Kothari Commission Report will help you in answering the questions which follow:

2.4.1 Kothari Commission

The Education Commission report also known as the Kothari Commission (1964-66) marks a historic moment in policy discourse on women’s education. It saw gender differences as socially constructed and unscientific, yet at the same time it could not move beyond an urban, middle-class vision for educating girls. The report while talking of the outcome of education saw women in the role of contributing to National Development. The newborn Indian nation needed to increase its productivity. This was also the decade of the Green Revolution. For women, therefore, work needed to be done outside the ‘home’ to increase productivity. It was assumed that women were primarily within the home and not engaged in any productive activity. As we can see, large numbers of women, who were poor and working in the unorganized sector were not part of the understanding of “working women.”

The National Curriculum Framework of 1975 further strengthened the link between women’s education and the modernizing nation. It stipulated the 10+2+3 system, where the first 10 years consisted of a common curriculum for all students. At the policy level, it underlined the central argument of the Education Commission, that adopting science and technology education was essential for India’s social and economic transformation. While doing so, however, it laid the basis for linking girls’ and women’s education to the instrumentalist vision of development of the modernizing nation-state. This was in keeping with the explicitly instrumentalist approach to women’s education evident in the 4th five year plan (1969-74) where the ‘benefits’ of women’s education was linked to lower fertility and improving nutritional status of children.
6.53 The significance of the education of girls cannot be over-emphasized. For full development of our human resources, the improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of men. As stated earlier, the education of women can assist greatly in reducing the fertility rate. In the modern world, the role of the woman goes much beyond the home and the bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally with man, the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. This is the direction in which we shall have to move. In the struggle for freedom, Indian women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, poverty, ignorance and ill-health. Pg 135

......6.57 The role of women outside the home has become an important feature of the social and economic life of the country and in the years to come, this will assume large proportions affecting a majority of women. It will, therefore, be necessary to pay adequate attention to the problems of training and employment of women.

An important problem is to enable women to carry out their dual role of home-making and following a suitable career. The Census of 1961 shows that there are at present more than a million young women, below the age of 24 and with a minimum qualification of matriculation, who are working only as house-wives—and this number will increase still further in the days ahead. To enable these women to participate in programmes of national reconstruction, opportunities for part-time employment will have to be greatly increased. In addition, they will have to be drawn, wherever possible, into all types of nation-building activities on an honorary basis as well.

Side by side, opportunities for full time employment will also have to be expanded. As the age of marriage continues to rise, full-time employment will have to be provided for almost all young unmarried women. It may also be expected that, as in other countries, once their children reach a school-going age, women will have a great deal of time on their hands and will desire to spend it usefully by taking up full-time employment. This need also will have to be satisfactorily met. Teaching, nursing and social service are well-recognised areas where women can have a useful role to play. Opportunities for women will have to be largely expanded in these fields and several new avenues, covering almost all the different walks of life will have to be opened out. (pp. 138-139)
Check Your Progress:

1) What is the purpose of women’s education that is put forth by the commission? How will it benefit the nation in the view of the Kothari Commission?

2) What is the new challenge facing the Nation and how are women expected to contribute to this?

3) Why do you think the Commission mentions that women need to contribute on an honorary basis?

4) Do you think this extract reflects the needs and situation of poor, labouring women or is it addressing only a particular section of women in India?

2.4.2 New Education Policy 1986: Education for Women’s Equality

The National Policy on Education (1986) was a culmination of processes that started in the 70’s. New articulations on justice and rights were made possible through the insights of national and global social and political movements in the 1970s. At the same time, there was growing international attention on the invisibility of women’s labour in national economies. The declaration of the International Women’s Year by the United Nations in 1975 saw the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) by the Ministry of Education.

This Committee submitted a report titled ‘Towards Equality’ that shifted the discourse on women’s rights. It highlighted how inequities of caste, class affected women specifically pointing out that poor women’s lives were different from those belonging to higher income groups. It pointed out that women’s productive roles had hitherto remained unacknowledged in policies and consequently their needs had remained un-addressed. The committee also pointed out that in the area of social values and attitudes, formal education had failed to initiate change and that if anything, education had served to deepen class differences between women since independence. Towards Equality raised questions on what was seen as relevant knowledge for women and argued that the definition of knowledge needs to take into account local and specific needs of women. Women worked as farmers artisans, as fisherwomen and as vegetable sellers. Education should equip women and girls for roles not merely within the domestic sphere but build on the substantive contributions they make in the productive sphere.

The Commission noted that to promote equality it will not only be necessary to provide for equal opportunities for all, but also create conditions for its success. It recommended that syllabi need to be made more relevant for
children of rural areas, by offering practical subjects like animal husbandry and cattle care as options along with subjects like history and science. It also recommended that textbooks be revised to bring women into greater focus.

The idea of Empowerment was well established in the 80’s and as a result we see a new understanding emerge regarding the role of education. The National Policy on Education, \{NPE (1986)\}, has been hailed as a path-breaking document as it emphasized the re-orientation of the national education system to play a ‘positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women… [and] the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators.. [as] an act of faith and social engineering’. Coming as it did in the wake of the women’s movement, the vision of the NPE echoed the demand that education be ‘used as an agent of basic change in the status of women’. Textbooks were revised at various levels following the NPE’s recommendations.

**Box No. 2.4**

*Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. Women’s studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to further women’s development.*

*The removal of women’s illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women’s participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereo-typing in vocational and professional courses and to promote women’s participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emergent technologies.*
**Check Your Progress**

1) What is articulated as the main objective of educating women in the extracts that you have read above?

2) Write the difference in vision between these two policy extracts as to the outcomes of educating women?

3) Can you give reasons for changes between these two policies which are formulated over two decades apart from each other?

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2.5 DEVELOPING A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN EDUCATION

Let us begin by reading this story taken from the third standard Hindi language text book, Bal Bharti part V - titled ‘For the Sparrow’

**Box No.2.5**

His name was Balram. The name of his village, Pokhari. His work was farming. The difficulty was that he was not interested in farming. All his ancestral land was lying uncultivated. What ought he to do! He did feel hungry everyday. He would go to the forest and survive on fruits. When fruits were not available he would collect dried pieces of wood and exchange them in the village for some bread. He would somehow fill his stomach. At times he would consider tilling his ancestral land but farming was not his forte. One day Balram was in the forest collecting, firewood. Suddenly his hand came in contact with something very soft. He could hear a faint sound. Balram looked with interest and found a small sparrow there. Balram picked up the sparrow. She was weak and sick. He felt that the bird was saying something to him.

He thought the bird must be thirsty and therefore he gave her a few drops of water. He gave her a fruit to eat. He kept the bird on his shoulder all day long.

In the evening he went to his neighbour and in exchange for the wood he bought back some grain. Balram gave the grain to the bird and said, “look dear bird, stay in my house. When you are better you can fly away.”
The bird was happy in Balram’s house. Everyday she would perch herself on his shoulder and go to the jungle. On the way she would sing him sweet songs. In the evening she would come back with him. Balram would take a lot of care of the sparrow. Now he would go everyday to get wood and from selling this he would get food for himself and the sparrow everyday. Both would chat with each other. Slowly Balram started to love the bird. He had found a companion.

As the bird recovered, the possibility of her leaving became real. Finally Balram started to work on his unproductive land. He worked very, very hard. The bird in all this kept flying around him.

In some time, the sown crop was standing in the field and when it ripened, the house was overflowing with grain. Balram showed this to the sparrow and said, “this is all for you. Now you need not go anywhere. Now you stay with me always.” On listening to Balram the sparrow started singing with joy! [emphasis added]

Is this just a sweet, innocent story about a young boy and a bird becoming friends or does this communicate something else? The sparrow makes an honourable and responsible man out of Balram, while he makes sure that she gives up her instinct to fly (away) forever. The sparrow needed the security of the grain to insure that she had a reason to stay. It is possible to interpret this story in gendered terms: the bird is the embodiment of the feminine, who sings her sweet song and dances on Balram’s shoulder and is weak and needy.

The bird in a sense symbolises women who in ‘marriage’, depend on men as the bread winners. Balram as his name suggests is strong and capable of hard work and becomes like the ‘man’ of the household through providing for the dependent bird. If we go a step further what this story lays out is ideal ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behaviour for men and women.

The ‘feminine’ is represented as what is close to nature, a matter of habit, while the masculine is protected as cultural, a matter of struggle and accomplishment. What this story show us is that school curriculum is not neutral knowledge and the act of identification or prioritisation of certain kinds of knowledge involves making choices—an act of power. There are no universal truths or values that textbooks have to put out. Walkerdine (1992) rightly states

“It is through powerful practices that particular fictions became reality, or in some cases facts gather the status of becoming fictions. Therefore, it is the relationship between knowledge and power that requires attention in education”.
In the story, we observe that Balram achieves something through his efforts, while the Bird does what is expected of women, curbs her instinct to fly, and remains within the home. Here, we see that the story has prescribed gender roles without stating that as its purpose. The objective claimed here is to teach Hindi language while simultaneously transmitting values to children. A chapter such as this demonstrates how the absence of power as a critical grid to understand gender relations, has led to efforts at including gender in textbooks as primarily combining gender with other categories of caste and class. The construction and experience of femininity and masculinity are part and parcel of these relations of power and not external to them. Power is the central concept that clarifies gender. Gender, therefore is not merely a matter of difference but involves issues of subordination and domination. Power is the key to understanding political, social and economic relations in society.

Feminist scholars and academics have pointed out that power is at the heart of understanding relations between men and women, as well as between other social groups. Yet power is not simply a matter of control over others, but involves complex and subtle ways in which men and women, boys and girls participate in the creation of themselves, in the act of creating the other. Getting your gender right, learning the ‘obvious’ or the ‘normal’ in terms of gender or sexual identity are an intrinsic part of the process of schooling. The need to be normal or to be correctly gendered becomes almost a moral need. These so-called ‘needs’ are created and embedded in the objectives that textbooks (for instance) state as their vision for children. For example textbooks state that the learner needs to be sensitised to certain ideal values and behaviour. Therefore, in the case of gender physical differences, the economic relations and values converge to discipline or construct particular male-female identities as ‘normal’. At the same time, we are also aware that there is no tidy, single-track explanation for how gender comes into play. Gender identity is also constructed by a web of other intersecting factors, which include class, caste, nation - and so on. If we look at textbooks from a feminist standpoint it helps us to move beyond simple categories of male-female, victim-oppressor, right-wrong, visible-invisible, to look at new ways in which writing and thinking about the communication of concepts, ideas, information to children is done.

2.5.1 Curricular Analysis: Paving the Way

Despite the above observations, gender has come to be understood and been operationalised in education in specific ways, which is symptomatic of a larger problem. Educational critiques of gender in India have largely remained confined within a universalist framework of sexism. The tone was set by N.N. Kalia (1979) in his content analysis of 41 language textbooks produced by the NCERT and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
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Kalia analysed the roles given to male and female characters, the language used to describe them, the nature of economic participation of the sexes and the role models provided to children through the form of biographies. While Kalia’s findings provided ‘damnable’ evidence of sexist stereotypes, his critique located itself in terms of sex as an isolated category. Operating within seemingly Universalist norms, he failed to consider how the content of Indian textbooks was specifically Indian, or how gender representation was linked to other structures of power and hierarchy.

The limits of content analysis in understanding gender relations were pointed out by Krishna Kumar (Bhog, 2002). According to him, content analysis played an important role in exposing a sexist bias, but it resulted in writers producing texts that avoided explicit references to sex-related characteristics rather than seriously altering the content. Recognising that the sexist bias went deeper than conventional analysis could capture, Kumar, in his comparative study of Indian and Canadian textbooks, looked at the bias embedded in the structure of relationships as well as in isolated features in the text.

From a different theoretical perspective, T. Scrace (1993) looked at the role of textbooks in reproducing not gender but class asymmetries. Through a content analysis of textbooks being used in the state of West Bengal, Scarce pointed to the role of education in representing and promoting middle-class interests, despite claims to the contrary by the Central and State governments. (Bhog, 2002)

None of these critiques moved beyond looking at gender as a somewhat isolated and independent marker of social and cultural inequities. Still, the question of gender justice in education did acquire a certain credibility and prominence as a result of these critical inquiries. Beginning with the Towards Equality Report (1974), there was increasing recognition by the State that the question of gender could not be subsumed within the larger rubric of development. Specific and targeted attempts had to be made to address gender discrimination in all developmental initiatives, including education. The NCERT established a special cell to look into how gender parity could be achieved in the teaching of learning materials. This in turn led to the birth of a women’s education unit, which was credited with the publication of handbooks on achieving gender sensitivity in the classroom for teachers.

But NCERT’s ‘reforms’, for the most part, were confined to ‘making visible’ the achievements of women in history, removing ‘negative’ gender references, establishing the dignity of house work, and so on. This effort of the 1980s was largely replicated in the 1990s, following the announcement of the National Policy of Education in 1986. At the level of textual strategy, there was little to differentiate the material that was published in the 1990s from that produced a decade before. Gender in curricula still remained located
within the narrow confines of sexist bias and positive imagery, as mentioned earlier, with quantitative increase in female representation and simple role reversals as its primary vehicle. So girls were shown going to school, playing a sport, dancing, eating well, being adventurous, etc—just like boys. Boys made tea, or carried pots of water on their heads.

This ‘add women and stir’ approach, symbolised in two publications of NCERT, informed two decades of reforms in the arena of gender in mainstream education. The Status of Women through Curriculum for both Elementary (1982) and Secondary and Senior Secondary stages (1984) gave detailed suggestions on how teachers could gender-sensitise the existing curriculum. The illustration below shows the typical suggestions outlined in these publications.

Gender was firmly located in the social domain and was seen as an attitudinal or value-related problem. That gender has a material basis and is closely tied to how labour, production and reproduction are organised in society was by and large absent. Motherhood and heroic women continued to be valorised as part of our distinct culture and heritage. The texts were caught in the familiar task of fashioning what the modern Indian women could (and should) be — a safe amalgamation of the old and the new. The handbook also reiterated that ‘care must be taken to see that the main objective of the new status of women is to generate a spirit of cooperation with the other sex and not of confrontation’ (NCERT, 1982, p.11). Clearly, there was a sense of the possible repercussions in providing equal status to women, but the analysis was kept strictly out of the domain of power.

This absence of an articulation that identified gender relations as relations of power, translated to textbooks rearticulating patriarchal relations in new ways. For instance, the public-private divide was maintained by moving some women out of the private to the public sphere. These were unique, exceptional women — which kept the hierarchy between the public and the private intact. Secondly, the replication of the private in the public when it came to representing women, with adult women being primarily shown as teachers, nurses or caregivers outside the home too, maintained the divide. Women in the public domain replicated the same roles that they performed in the private. As a result, formal equality was granted as structures were left untouched. Certain forms of writing, narratives, identified as feminine or not part of classical literature or formal political theory also found themselves outside the fold of school curricula, indicating that a silence on certain aspects of representation of both men and women continued as before.

That women are tribal, Dalit or perhaps poor daily wage workers was seen as inconsequential to textbook writers. However, while on the one hand gender was seen in isolation, stripped of other identities, in practice it
functioned as a marker for the construction of other identities. For instance, in the introduction to the section on Sanskrit in *The Status of Women through Curriculum* (Elementary Teacher’s Handbook, 1982), the suggestion to the teacher is to guide the child to recognise the high status enjoyed by women in the ancient Vedic period. Efforts were to be made to highlight how women were “sharing all responsibilities with their male counterparts, and participated freely not only in the rituals but also in the spiritual discussions and discourses... were profound scholars... accompanied warriors to the battlefield, looked after the administration of the ashrams and even selected their life companions” (p. 9). Here, the emphasis was not on women, but on declaring the rich and glorious tradition of India as ‘*adarsh*’, ideal. To establish that India was as modern and progressive as any developed nation today.

### 2.5.2 Feminist Lens in Educational Content and Pedagogy

It is not enough to just “include” women in the curriculum. The critical challenge is one of developing alternative frameworks of knowledge that equally reflect the life worlds of both men and women and carry within them the seeds of a just social transformation.

It is important to recognise that regardless of all the work produced by feminist scholars unless a gender perspective is incorporated in the syllabi each generation of children will absorb the biases of existing ways of understanding society and reproduce these ways of thinking into the future.

### 2.5.3 Content

As you have seen in Block 4 of MWG 001, it becomes imperative that we address the larger context of feminist critiques of knowledge to clearly understand how we can progressively inform, transform, and map the gender contours of disciplinary knowledge to delineate a more inclusive and democratic curriculum framework. This implies not only addressing the initial “invisibility” and under-representation of women across the disciplines but also the manner, if and when, in which they enter it, and the interlinkages between competing inequalities of caste, class, race, ethnicity, and gender. In addition, it also implies that true knowledge is liberating, crafted with the goal of social transformation. This requires that individuals, be it teachers, textbook writers, or students, read, write and relate to the text with an awareness of their positions in the complex hierarchy of domination and subordination in which we live.

For example: History continues to remain the monopoly of men, especially a few powerful men while women are relegated to a mere mechanical enumeration of such and such women who ‘also’ on occasion wielded power (like Razia Begum, Nurjahan or Rani Lakshmibai). The primary reason for this exclusion is the limited disciplinary focus on power, narrowly associated
with momentous events that resulted in shifts of power in time and understood as being operative only in the public domain. Feminist historians have therefore argued that given the sexual division of labour, and the concurrent creation of a public/private dichotomy and the hierarchy of values attached to them, women will remain marginal in any account of history. Hence, what is required is a paradigm shift in the framework of history - a move beyond merely being the history of production to the history of social reproduction - of the reproduction of the household and of the labour-force and human and cultural resources more generally. Unless this happens, women will never feature adequately in history in a way that does justice to their work, their lives and the totality of their experiences.

Language cuts across all disciplines, is basic to the construction of knowledge and has pervasive and wide-ranging implications for gender relations. It functions as a carrier of ideas and assumptions, which are naturalised and also reinforced through everyday exchanges. They become so conventional that we miss their significance. Sexism pervades language - it penetrates its morphology (eg. word endings), affects stylistic conventions and functions through something as common and everyday as the generic use of “man” to designate all humanity. Similarly, in naming conventions women were traditionally marked either by their father’s or their husband’s surname—passing from one to the other. The titles Miss and Mrs. indicate women’s marital status, whereas there is no such indicator in men’s titles. Therefore the need to sensitise students to the way that language functions and how it entrenches ideas and naturalises power differences is pervasive.

It is also argued that language does not merely project something that out there and already exists but also shapes and constitutes it as well as our attitudes towards it. Thus using language differently can actually change conditions and situations. Students should therefore be taught that language matters, not only on the superficial level of “political correctness” but on the deeper level of changing attitudes and thereby situations that obtain in the world. Using the word “black” instead of “negro” or “differently abled” instead of “disabled” or “sex worker” instead of “prostitute” is not just about greater social acceptability but about being aware of histories of oppression, segregation and moral condemnation and the will to change it. Since the way we teach is as important as what we teach, let us look at pedagogy in the section which follows.

### 2.5.4 Pedagogy

Teacher and student engagement is critical in the classroom because it has the power to define whose knowledge will become a part of school-related knowledge and whose voices will shape it. Students are not just young people for whom adults should devise solutions. They are critical observers of their own condition and needs and should be participants in discussions
and problem solving related to their education and future opportunities. Hence children need to be aware that their experiences and perceptions are important and be encouraged to develop their mental skills needed to think and reason independently. What children learn out of school - their capacities, learning abilities, and knowledge base - and bring to school is important to further enhance the learning process. This is all the more critical for children from underprivileged backgrounds, especially girls, as the worlds they inhabit and their realities are underrepresented.

Learning from Conflict: If children’s social experiences are to be brought into classrooms, it is inevitable that issues of conflict must be addressed. Conflict is an inescapable part of children’s lives. They constantly encounter situations which call for moral assessment and action, whether in relation to subjective experiences of conflict involving the self, family and society or in dealing with exposure to violent conflict in the contemporary world. Yet the official curriculum tends to treat knowledge as neutral, erasing conflict in order to legitimise a certain vision of society and its knowledge, a vision that is related to dominant discourses.

Learning about alternate ways of being - or ways of being that are usually made invisible or delegitimized - involves ‘unlearning’ gender, both at the individual and collective levels. To enable children to do this, the curriculum has to accommodate pedagogic strategies that deal with the idea of conflict, between what is observed and valued in contemporary society, in the social words that children inhabit, and what can be in a gender-just and less violent world. To use conflict as a pedagogic strategy is to enable children to deal with conflict and facilitate awareness of its nature and role in their lives. What are some prominent pedagogic strategies that can be used productively to promote gender sensitization through education? Let examine some of them:

- **Participation** - Most feminist educators understand that knowledge is not neutral, that the teacher and students alike bring ‘texts’ of their own to the classroom which shape the transactions within it. Feminist pedagogy emphasises participatory learning and teaching, within which subjectivity, emotion and experience have a definite and valued place. While participation is a powerful strategy, its pedagogic edge is blunted when it is ritualised. Participation, when seen as an instrument to achieve certain specified, predetermined objectives and where the teacher’s own ideas dominate classroom discussions is not meaningful. It involves appreciation of the importance of starting from experience of both students and teachers.

- **Recognising Difference**: Implicit in any effort at facilitating real participation is to work with the principle of recognising difference. As children share and reflect on their individual and collective experiences
they simultaneously acknowledge and relate these to the experiences of others who may not form a part of their social reality. It is important that this difference not be marked by status but by diversity. Pedagogies that provide space for individual children to express themselves freely in the classroom, without fear of judgement and stereotyping are essential building blocks in working towards a future where they can have more critical engagements with what is being taught in the middle and higher classes.

- **Reading against the Grain**: However, it is possible, and also necessary, to be able to equip students to ‘read against the grain’, to critically question received knowledge, whether it is the ‘biased’ textbook, or other literary sources in their own environments. Undoubtedly, this is an objective that education would aspire for in the higher school. Yet, there is a need to build in approaches that encourage learners to comment, compare and think about elements that exist in their own environment. Women educators have used songs as a powerful medium for discussion, comment and analysis in cultures that are primarily oral. As repositories of knowledge exist in different mediums, all these forms whether television, advertisements, songs, paintings etc need to be brought in to create a dynamic interaction between learners themselves. Lateral learning processes necessitate new equations between the teacher and the student.

- **Acknowledging Power**: A gender-sensitive pedagogy is one that does not merely affirm different individual and collective experiences but it locates these within larger structures of power. Questions such as who is allowed to speak for whom? Whose knowledge is most valued? Inform engagements with learners. A Bachelor of Elementary Education teacher reflected on her course that the ‘gender and schooling paper’ has made her conscious of these realities. She said that she may not be able to change everything but she will try and make a difference where she can within the classroom. This translates into evolving differing strategies for different learners. For example, encouraging a child to speak in class may be important for some children and learning to listen to others may be of priority for others.

- **The Teacher as Facilitator**: The teacher's role is to provide a safe space for children to express themselves and simultaneously to build in certain forms of interactions. While consolidating and constructively pushing the limits of the learner's understanding, s/he needs to be conscious of how differences are expressed. An atmosphere of trust would make the classroom a safe space where children can share experiences, where conflict can be acknowledged and constructively questioned, and where resolutions, however tentative, can be mutually worked out. A space where they can practice democratic ways of
interacting with each other and build skills to negotiate with conflicts outside the school. For girls in particular, schools and classrooms should be spaces to discuss processes of decision making, to interrogate the basis of their decisions and to make informed choices.

The construction of the female learner as passive may act against her within participatory teaching and learning contexts. In our schools, where gender-based constructions underpin ideas of classroom discipline and strict divisions are maintained between girls and boys, a girl who is interactive is likely to be pulled up for transgressing the ‘gender code’. Clearly, there needs to be a rethinking of the agency of the learner in the classroom context. This reconceptualisation has to become an organic part of the way we think of education today and find a prominent place in teacher training programmes.

**Box No 2.5**

*How can it be that femininity is a fiction and yet lived as though it was real, felt deeply, as though it was a universal truth of the psyche? It is not that we are filled with roles and stereotypes of passive femininity so that we become what society have set out for us. Rather, I am suggesting that femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to the fantasies deeply embedded in the social world which take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices, through schooling, through which we are regulated.*

-Valerie Walkerdine (1991)

**2.6 LET US SUM UP**

For three decades gender has been accepted as a category in the formulation of policy and curricula frameworks in India. “Gender”, “Equality” and “Empowerment” of girls have also been used as key words in educational documents for long as it is evident from the policy review section. An important question that we have raised is - what have been the limitations of our approach and efforts in formulating curricula policy, textbook rewriting and practices in the classroom? We have seen that “Gender” has primarily been viewed:

- As concerning only girls and women (a biological category)
- As an isolated category, not related to other issues
- In terms of provision of equal facilities

A focus on “Equality” has led to strategies focussing on:

- Increasing representation of these notions of gender in educational material
• “Sensitive” portrayals of discrimination that girls/women face
• Portraying positive role models and enacting role reversals of stereotypes
• Neutralising texts of any gendered references.
• The formal or sameness approach that focuses on equal treatment rather than equality of outcome.

Locating women and girls solely within the family, and represents the functional roles they play as homemakers, mothers of future citizens, bearers of traditional and spiritual values, and supplementary income-generators, rather than focusing on the self-actualisation of girls and on developing their cognitive, creative and critical abilities. This approach effaces their very identity and rights as autonomous human beings.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) How have the aims of educating women in India changed over time? In your view, what are the factors that have contributed to this changing vision?
2) What is the critique that feminist educators have made of the existing gender framework in education? What is the key conceptual shift that exists between the two?
3) Identify the limitations that exist in the present approach to including gender in education both at the level of policy and content of education.

2.8 REFERENCES


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### 2.9 SELECTED READINGS

