UNIT 6 UNDERSTANDING GENDER

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, you have to understand various issues related to gender so that you can impart and explain to students and practice them in a positive manner. In this unit, we have tried to explain infants learn to see themselves as girls and boys in their cultures. This process of sex role identity is based on differential, often unequal and discriminatory treatment, leads to the formation of low/negative self concept in girls and a low/negative self concept among girls not only inhibits their self expression and achievements but is transmitted intergenerationally (from mothers to daughters). This process needs to be understood by teachers so that every one in the society can get an equal chance to grow and we don’t discriminate against one sex in our classrooms and surroundings. The provisions related to children’s rights, education etc. available in the constitution of India along with gender scenario in education are elaborated in this unit.

6.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the various perceptions regarding the social roles of women and men
- understand the processes that lead to the formation of the gender biases
- understand how discrimination based on gender leads to poor self esteem among girls
- appreciate various constitutional provisions and educational policies related to girls’ education

6.3 THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Different cultures treat children in different ways and formulate their concepts related to boys and girls; accordingly some of the propositions of girls and boys are dealt with this section.
Some Propositions

We observe many differences among girls and boys at home, on the street, inside the classroom, in the play-field, during the school recess and so on. For instance;

Proposition one:

- We not only observe these differences but also believe these are natural and inherent in the two sexes – are biological and hence unchangeable.
- We also believe that they are "born that way".

Proposition two:

- The social roles of men and women being cultural constructions, vary across space and time.

Proposition three

- These differences are a result of ages of social experiences of the two sexes – are socially created and determined, and, therefore, changeable.

Proposition four:

- The present day human civilization both demand and creates new possibilities for the social roles of the two sexes as complementary and equal, globally.

Difference between Sex and Gender

- The former is biologically determined; the latter imputes values on biological differences.
- Gender is the cultural definition of sex role appropriate behaviour.
- One is born male or female but it is one's culture which makes one masculine or feminine.
- Gender differentiation is more ancient, more widespread than any other type of social differentiation.

Patriarchy and Matriarchy

Gender differentiation and behaviour patterns largely depend upon the society's nature like patriarchy or matriarchy, which are explained below:

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Power rests with the eldest male in the family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrilineal</td>
<td>Property devolves from father to son as well as family (name)</td>
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<td>line runs the same way</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrilocal</td>
<td>Son of the family gets a bride to stay in his father's house</td>
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<td>the location of a family is in a father's house/locality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matriarchal</td>
<td>Power rests with the eldest female in the family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matrilineal</td>
<td>property devolves from mother to daughter as well as family</td>
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<td>(name) line runs the same way</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Daughter of the family gets a husband to stay in her mother's</td>
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<td>house – the location of a family is in a mother's house.</td>
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6.3.1 Gender Roles: A Cross Cultural Profile

The history of mankind can be viewed among other things, as a history of unequal relations between its two halves – men and women. The two sexes have never shared the world of equality and even today woman is handicapped. Division of labour and ascription of social status in relation to sex seems basic to all societies. Gender
differentiation is more ancient and more widespread than any form of social
differentiation. Though cultures are always changing, most cultural behaviour
patterns, for instance, gender roles of their members show a considerable degree of
persistence and continuity over long periods.

All societies ascribe different attributes and activities to men and women. Most of
these prescriptions are rationalized in terms of biological and psychological
differences – differences in roles in reproduction and physical characteristics of
height, weight, muscular strength etc. However, comparative studies of roles and
status ascribed to women and men in different cultures seem to show that while such
factors might have seemed as the starting point of division of labour between sexes,
mostly these are culturally defined. Even the psychological characteristics ascribed to
men and women in different cultures vary so much that they can have little
psychological bases. Although, preferred female attributes and behaviour vary
universally over a considerable range in most societies there is a core of preferred and
imputed feminine attributes and behaviour.

Each culture has its own prescriptions of sex role and appropriate behaviour which are
accepted as facts. Children are brought up to fit the designated patterns and any
deviation from the norm is punished. Women as men acquire, through a process of
socialization, a set of attitudes, choices and behaviours which are consistent with the
sex roles they are expected to play in society. The sex role belief system operates in
several ways. Given, a thorough socialization, a woman may never consider roles
other than the traditional feminine roles as mother and wife. This ideology is
internalised by girls and women and the restrictions placed on her self development
are likely to be accepted as very normal and unchallengeable. Children derive a set of
expectations from their culture about themselves, ‘learn what to like and cherish and
what to disdain and avoid.’

Occupations assigned to men and women also vary from culture to culture, society to
society. Arapesh women carry heavy loads because it is believed their heads are so
much harder and stronger, so do African, Asian and Indian women. The head loaders
of Tamil Nadu women carrying wood on their heads and backs in hills and plains of
India, are a familiar sight as is breaking of stones day after day for building roads and
houses. Ralph Linton, an eminent Sociologist writes that among Marquesas, cooking,
house keeping and baby tending are proper male occupations. Yet in most societies,
sex division patterns are constant. However, present day human constantly demands
and has in fact created new possibilities for the socio-economic roles of the two sexes
as complementary and equal.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What do you understand by the process of socialization?

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2. Identify two main features internalised by women/girls in your community
through the process of socialisation.

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We shall now take a few examples from around the world to illustrate the various roles of gender among different groups:

Margaret Mead, an anthropologist, worked among New Guinea tribes and observed the following:

- **Arapesh** – both men and women are responsive to the needs and consensus of others and avoid aggressiveness and competition. In sum, they conform to behaviour patterns that can be termed feminine in our culture.

- **Mudugumor** – Cannibalistic – both sexes characterized by hostility, aggressiveness, violence, lack of consideration for the rights and feelings of others – qualities considered masculine.

- **Tchambugi** – Tchambugi men are sensitive, carefully groomed, artistic, emotionally volatile and given to bickering. Women are stable, practical, dominant and aggressive.

- African men by nature of their skeletal and muscular build are suited for heavy labour. Most Africans believe otherwise. When told that American men do the heavy work, African women expressed dismay and disapproval. They are making a mistake because everyone knows that men drink too much and do not eat enough to keep their strength. They are too tense and too inclined to wander about to develop right muscles and habits needed for sustained agriculture. Men, they feel, are not suited by nature for this kind of work. And, as we know, all farm work and marketing is done by women who produce 75% of Africa’s food.

- **Iran** – Men are not expected to be strong and silent, but are expected to show their emotions and even have tantrums. If they don’t, they are considered to be lacking in vital human traits, and not dependable. Iranian men enjoy poetry and are supposed to be sensitive, intuitive, and not very logical, while women are supposed to be logical and practical.

- **Philippines** – a matrilineal society till colonial invasions has a continuing tradition of females being responsible for looking after their parents in old age. This makes them important and parents invest in their education and well-being. In Philippines there are more girls than boys at the high school and university level.

### 6.3.2 Impact of Socialization Practices

**Patriarchal Families**

Sex role does more than incline the individuals to choose occupations traditionally assigned to their sex. It also fosters needs, values, and skills that cause women not to enter the labour force at all and others do so intermittently. Traditional sex role socialization lays more emphasis on achievement and occupational success in boys than girls. There are studies to support this idea and to demonstrate an inverse relationship between sex role ideology and achievement aspiration. A study found that holding traditional sex role values was significantly related to a low level of aspiration as defined by education, income and work plans. These traditional values include beliefs such as women should not achieve greater success than their husbands or else the emotional balance of the family suffers.

Great social, economic and political changes have swept the subcontinent but the stable family structure and the spirit of family solidarity has remained a sustaining power, largely on account of the subservience of women and their tendency to accept the unequal division of labour and resources. The Indian family is predominantly
patriarchal. Emphases and the authority structure even in nuclear households is similar to that of the traditional joint family in which the male head of the household has power over all younger males and all females.

The family role of women includes child bearing, child rearing, sick care and all other domestic work, which determine the early socialization of the females and their educational and occupational choices and their performance in the occupational sphere later. A female child for one, is brought up to understand she has come into existence as a mark of favour to her as she is not as valuable as a male child. In South Asian societies, a woman’s sense of worth is related to the social standing she achieves as a mother of sons. She grows up to adjust to her inferior position in case she bears the girl child. The values inculcated in girls and mothers are, for instance, submissiveness, accommodation, deference to the wishes of other people, restraint, humility and tolerance of any excesses against her sex both in parental home and later in her husband’s family.

The restrictive effect of traditional sex roles socialization in the family has its parallel in educational practices and institutions. This limits not only the range of occupations chosen by women but also lands them in low ranking occupations corresponding to their assisting and nurturing roles in the household.

Thus, traditionally education has contributed to educational and occupational stratification between the sexes by encouraging and preparing girls to pursue an extremely limited number of traditionally feminine roles and occupations. High level of sex segregation exists in the work force and women enter a limited number of feminine sex stereotyped occupations, which are also low in status. Further, the unequal position of women in the family is determined and reinforced by the dictates of the organized religion. None of the major religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity ever conceded complete equality to women and have in fact institutionalised the secondary position of women versus men through written word and oral interpretations by the male clergy. The religion acts as an important cultural factor, which reinforces the traditional perception of women as subordinate to males and under male control. The ideal of womanhood is still modelled on the Brahmanical tradition and linked to a strongly patriarchal culture assigning a secondary position to women. Buddhism and Christianity offer a relatively more egalitarian existence to women but within the patriarchal mode. Caring for the husband and the children and other members of the family is clearly enjoined on women as a ‘first duty’ and no laxity on this score on the part of women is tolerated. In popular Buddhism and Islam, women are not allowed to participate in certain religious ceremonies along with men. This is largely due to the myth of uncleanliness. For example, women are not allowed into the Devalayas to perform the Pongal ceremony or participate in funeral rites in some sections of India. In certain parts of Sri Lanka, women are not allowed to step on the threshing floor as it is believed their uncleanliness/pollution, can lead to low yields. In the Indian mythology, male female equality and complementarity is visible and the concept of Ardhnariswar (Half male, Half female God) exists but all the major prophetic religions assert male superiority and lay down prescriptions and proscriptions for females barring the Bahai faith which gives complete equality and respect to women as men and sees the both as two wings of a bird.

Check your Progress 2
i) Who are responsible for reinforcing the traditional perception of women as subordinate to men?
Moving Towards Equality

Matrilineal groups

Within India, among matrilineal groups in Meghalaya, women are more confident and in command of land and assets. Men have a second class status. The Kerala Nair women were till recently matrilineal and matrilocal. They had upper caste visiting husbands who had to disappear before day break. The property devolved from the mother to daughter. This community has given up this kinship pattern and now follows the customs of patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal kinship patterns. Even so Nair women are far more egalitarian in their outlook. Among some of the Central India and North-East tribes women enjoy greater equality and are the backbone of the subsistence households, men drink and do very little. Among hill tribes, women are highly valued and practices for marriage range from elopement to abduction where a girl is returned to her natal home if she does not give consent for marriage.

It is intriguing to witness the situation as it prevails in Lakshadweep where one finds a peculiar admixture of the Patriarchal Islam and the basic matrilineal, matrilocal form of family and kinship. In this society where nearly the entire population professes Islam, female literacy is as high as 90% and above and women enjoy complete freedom of movement and the property devolves from the mother to the daughter. Women are visiting husbands during the night and go back to their own parental home in the morning for the day’s work and it is the men who have to prepare a full dower and support their wives and children.

Mizo women have the highest literacy rates in the country as also, the highest work participation rate. And yet, the gender roles and the division of labour and resources remain traditional. According to the Mizo customs, women have no right to property and for children after divorce which is considered final after the mere utterance of the word ‘Mak’ by the husband. Traditionally males dominate women who are comparatively hard working and self-sacrificing - do all agricultural and other and other work from dawn till late night. "A woman has no rights at all. Body, mind and spirit of her belonged from her birth to death to her father, her mother, her husband. Her men folk could treat her as they liked and a man who did not beat his wife was scorned by his friends a s coward". It is no surprise to listen that a husband sitting near the fire and seeing the pot boil over, would call the wife to look after the cooking even if she was busy pounding the rice outside.

Some of the popular sayings in Mizoram which are gender biased are:

A woman’s wit does not cross the water point.
A wife, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, better they be.
Women and crabs do not have a religion.
Crab’s meat is not counted as meat as woman’s word is not counted as word, bad wife and bad fence can be changed. But uncontrolled wife and uncontrolled grass are both unbearable.

6.4 GENDER ROLE IDENTITY AND SELF CONCEPT IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Gender roles are learnt in the family from parents, older siblings other members who provide role models appropriate to the sex of a person. Learning is reinforced at appropriate points. Girls are given dolls, boys are given guns. Girls are asked to help mothers while boys are allowed to roam and play. Biological sex and social gender are separable concepts from a development point of view as seen earlier. Physically, a child perceives himself or herself as a boy or a girl by two to three years of age and by age five children have developed clearly defined sex role stereotypes regarding appropriate behaviours, traits and even experiences.
It is often observed that girls and women have a low self-image and a negative self-concept. They don’t feel themselves as needed, important or valued. Child rearing practices have a marked effect on the development of self-concept among children. Girls are valued little, often seen as a liability to be got rid off. Special value accorded to male children comes home to girls very early. Even among affectionate, caring parents, a little girl may hear a visitor exclaim, “Oh, what a sweet child! How wonderful it would have been if she was a boy”! Little girls watch how the birth of male baby is awaited (sure to be a boy this time!) and celebrated. Parents who have only daughters are pitied. You can see in many communities parents waiting for boy (with hope), after having 3–4 girls. If one asks them why you need a boy, reply is—to do the last rites of parents and to attain moksha.

A lifecycle review

At birth

If we observe the events at the birth of a child, we easily notice that in most parts of India, jubilation and celebrations await a son and gloom and resignation await a girl at birth. Even Dais (midwives) pull a long face as they would get no bakshish/badhai (tip). In a Delhi government dispensary, Dais bang a brass plate with a spoon for the boy and break an earthen pot if it is a girl. Boy is precious just as a metal is, a girl—only dust. Little girls watch all this and grow up to believe that a brother is more important and that boys are gems and girls are mere dust. Thus, embedding in them a low self esteem. Elders in the family all the time talk about things to glorify boys and humiliate girls lead to their low esteem and confidence.

Similarly during infancy, mothers breast-feed boys longer than girls, in some cases girls are not given either breast milk or milk at all; mothers themselves are discriminated against in food and rest after the birth of a girl. They transmit their disappointment through body language. Boys are cuddled and fondled more.

6-10 years old

There is no significant difference in height and weight in middle class homes but the majority of girls in (general) schools look poorly nourished and under weight. The pecking order is evident in family meals, the father and the son and then the mother and daughter. Even in relatively well off households, best foods are served to males, better pieces of meat and fish go to men and boys. The girls watch this and internalize their lack of importance.

The onset of puberty is seen as a disaster as now starts the period when the girl has to be guarded till her marriage.

Rituals, festivals, songs

Girls grow up observing the centrality of males in the household rituals and festivals. Little girls fast to get a good husband, women keep fasts to ensure long life of husband and prosperity. There are fasts for getting sons. There are festivals centred around brothers, the Raksha Bandhan and Bhaiya Dooj—when girls tie a colourful thread and apply vermilion to brothers, praying for their long life and in turn being assured of care and protection. And the boys, even when younger, see it as their prerogative to pass instructions to their older sisters.

Twice a year in Hindu homes, little girls (pre-pubertal) are worshipped as incarnates of Mother Goddess Durga. The temporariness of their membership of natal home is reinforced through songs and rituals when they are told their real home is that of their husbands. There is constant emphasis on preparing them for adjustment and
compliance in their husband's home. They are schooled not to raise their voice or answer back.

Wedding songs prepare girls for possible maltreatment and physical violence in the husband's house. Wife beating for instance is depicted as a natural part of nocturnal meetings. A Punjabi song goes like this, "At midnight he beat me up and broke my tender bones. In the morning he wipes my tears and wants to know where all I was hurt." Another one goes like, "As you go to water the fields of sweet potatoes, go your way but don't beat me up too hard as I am a tender girl."

Then there is the constant refrain - a search for suitors and the anxiety of huge dowrie. The parents of a girl are a harried lot. This fills girls up with a sense of shame and guilt and they watch helplessly. Some end up their lives to save their parents from this trauma. This scourge of dowry and maltreatment and burning of brides appears to have revived the practice of female infanticide in several parts of the country.

It is amply clear that sex role socialization not only tells girls they are different but also that they are unwanted and inferior and have to be grateful for being 'allowed' to go to school or to a friend's place or to work. All decisions are made for the girls by others. They are given no choices options. A girl in her natal home is considered a temporary member, in her husband's house an 'outsider'.

**Women hate to reproduce their own species**

In most parts of India, especially the North, the woman who gives birth to sons is valued and treated with a lot of good food, rest clothes and fineries. Those who beget daughters are neglected, underfed and even insulted. Who wants this fate! Girls should not be born appears to be the latest method of getting rid of them. At the foetal stage or else female infants, neonates are killed or poisoned or suffocated. Women hate themselves for being women who are often beaten up and insulted. What should they do with a girl who will meet the same fate when she grows up and will be a drain on family resources. “Spending on a girl is like watering the neighbour's garden” - such sayings abound in Indian and Chinese languages.

Elders bless young girls and women that they have a large number of sons. Sat Putri Ho (Punjab) (May you be blessed with seven sons!) As the bride enters her husband's household, in a ceremony, a male child is placed in her lap and a ritual with Til seeds and the accompanying song by women of the household which wishes her as many sons as the number of Til seeds in her fist. Each morning, when the bride touches the feet of the mother-in-laws she says "Sayin Jeeya Budh Suhagan Ho," (May your husband live long and you be his bride till old age). Little girls have observed that women keep fasts, for the birth of a son, for getting a husband like Siva, for the long life of the husband, for the long life of the sons, none for the girl child or her well being. If a boy is born after this little girl, she is considered auspicious and a lump of jaggery is broken on her back to signify her auspiciousness.

The girls learn too often, 'She is a stone around our neck'. She is blamed for being a girl for a dowry would have to be collected and given to get rid of her. The incidents of three sisters committing suicide in Kanpur (UP) and Kerala are not very old. Three sisters committed suicide in Chandigarh for the parents started ignoring them completely after the birth of a son.

Brought up thus, a girl child develops an inadequate, negative self concept. She is at best inadequate, lacks initiative, is timid, often afraid (of unknown fears), diffident, dependent, unable to express herself or take decisions, or to do much on her own. This would be the picture of a majority of the Indian girls belonging to rural areas (excluding tribals) and significant extent in urban areas also.
In urban areas, the picture is varied but the above analysis would apply to several
groups. The middle, upper middle class girls do not face gross discrimination in food,
and medical care, but in schooling, lower middle, middle and even upper middle
classes are prepared to invest more on the education of sons—though without results.
Middle class urban girls face more restrictions on physical movements after school as
compared to boys. And that helps them in some way. They help their mothers and are
still able to perform better in board examinations compared to boys. For a decade now
girls are doing better than boys even in science and mathematics, having higher pass
percentages than boys at secondary and higher secondary examinations. This
phenomenon can be observed not only in urban areas, but also in many rural areas.
This indicates gradually changing (may be slow) scene of improvement in status of
girl child in rural areas. They are becoming more confident and sure of themselves
and are entering a large number of non traditional occupations. The self concept of a
Bachendri Pal the famous mountaineer, a Kiran Bedi an outstanding police officer, a
Nivedita Bhasin an airline pilot, the new Air Force Girl Pilots and Army/Navy Girl
Officers, the NCC girls, the para jumpers, the horse riders Kalpana Chawla being sent
up in outer space by NASA and even women being Chief Ministers and members of
Cabinet are bound to be high. Competence and high achievement then are the
passwords for a positive self-concept.

Check your Progress 3

i) Which significant phenomenon is happening as far as girls education in the
Indian society particularly in urban and some rural areas?

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6.5 SELF CONCEPT AND SELF ESTEEM

Self-concept

Self-concept is how an individual views oneself. Self concept could be negative or
inadequate or it could be positive and adequate. Self image refers to the impression we
make on others and is used synonymously with self-concept. Strictly speaking self
image refers more to impressionistic aspects of self whereas the idea of self concept
includes the idea of impression as also other aspects such as attitudes, values, motives,
goals, expectations and the like.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the dynamic aspect of self concept through which an individual
constantly evaluates one’s self in relation to society, the amount of value we ascribe to
ourselves. Like other aspects of self, this is learned from others and becomes a
reflection of how others regard us or the value we think others attach to us as persons.
One’s behaviour reflects one’s self esteem and thus has a reassuring effect on others.
Thus, there is a reciprocal action between one’s self esteem and the esteem held for
one by others. High self esteem and high achievement motivation go hand in hand.
Low self esteem leads individuals to behave in ways that are self-derogatory and both
cause under achievement which in turn reinforces poor self esteem. Persons with low
need for achievement, lack confidence in themselves, are more anxious about failure
than they are about success, have low opinion of themselves, their abilities and are
attracted to low risk tasks.
Independence, self esteem and creativity

The person who has a firm sense of who s/he is and who takes responsibility for her/his own behaviour is one who resists turning over destiny to group control. The creative persons tended to describe themselves as individualistic, independent, determined, industrious and enthusiastic. Lower ranking creative persons used terms such as responsible, sincere, tolerant, reliable, dependable and understanding, in describing themselves — displaying a more passive, less involved image. More creative showed a high degree of involvement in their work as a greater self-expression.

Self actualization

Human organism has a need to be loved or to receive attention — if unmet, can lead to pathological symptoms, even death. Self-experience of the ordinary child is how s/he is loved by the parents. A child perceives herself as lovable, worthy of love and her relationship with parents is one of affection. S/he experiences all this with satisfaction. This is a significant and core element of the structure of self as it begins to form. In the perceptual field of the child the family serves as the primary social unit, the parents, within the family structure, act as socializing agents to provide goals and values from which the child develops patterns of behaviour. These behaviour patterns form the basis for interaction with others and elicit verbal and non-verbal responses from these significant others. The more negative the attitudes and feelings expressed through the responses of others, the more incongruent is the state of individual and less likely are the chances of attaining self actualisation i.e. realizing one's full potential. We all have within ourselves the potentiality for growth in positive directions. When we are placed in a positive, accepting environment, the process of self-actualization occurs.

Distortions in self-perception

When individuals grow up in an environment in which they learn negative attitudes, they are likely to retain these concepts inspite of all evidence to the contrary. Impact of environment and family background on attitudes towards girl child make a strong impact in developing negative self perception. Sometimes we have learned certain attitudes about ourselves which may not be valid and also get to know how others are trying to get us to unlearn these attitudes.

6.5.1 Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Gender

Gender roles are a learned behaviour. These roles in their social, economic and political dimensions vary across cultures. Values and norms differ widely from culture to culture. Gender roles have certain universality but are largely culturally determined. Gender roles are hard to change, but as these are socially created, they are not immutable and hence are changeable. Such change should start from home (family), school, local environment and society at large. Even media can play significant role in bringing positive change. Media’s role is not simply reporting how girl child is treated badly in a particular society or how dowry deaths are occurring, rather to give suggestions/solutions to overcome these socially created evils and issues.

How should schools act to release girls and boys from being prisoners of their gender?
Understanding Gender

Think about what you can do in your situation to help both sexes cross the Gender barricade

6.6 GENDER SCENARIO IN EDUCATION

Education of girls and women has been a premier policy concern and has received considerable attention as a part of socio economic planning since independence. Much has been achieved considering not even one in a hundred females in the population were found literate in 1901. At 2001 Census 52% of female population aged 7+ were literate and female literacy and girls' education grew at a faster pace compared to their male counterparts during the 1990s. The urban middle class girls are contenders for their male counterparts but a vast majority of rural girls, and those belonging to educationally backward minorities and urban sections; remain outside the fold of education due to poor access and low utilization. Given equal opportunity, girls do as well as boys, even better. As the secondary school board results are showing each year, girls tend to perform better than boys both in terms of pass percentage and now even in merit positions and grades. This continued good performance of girls has adequately established the fact that given equal access and opportunities, girls do as well as boys and even better. It would be pertinent to note that the girls who get as far as the secondary and higher secondary stages belong largely to urban middle class or are from among the better off rural populations. Even the situation is gradually changing in rural areas with more and more going to schools and performing better. As mentioned earlier, attitudinal changes on the part of everybody in the society towards girl child, would bring significant results in both their education and social status. Gender, caste and class appear to be the deciding factors for access and success in education. The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) put a premium on education of girls and women's empowerment as core factors for national development and the Tenth Five Year Plan squarely addresses the issues and constraints in true empowerment of women.

6.6.1 Constitutional Measures

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to take affirmative action in their favour to redress the cumulative disadvantage and provide the framework for socio legal action for removal of disparities. India has one of the largest array of laws for protecting the rights of women and is a signatory to all principal international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): the CEDAW (1979); the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Fundamental Rights and Duties

The Constitution grants Fundamental rights. Article 14 confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste and sex. Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in matters of public appointment for all. Article 21 provides for protection of life and
Towards Equa!ri! personal liberty. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour. Article 24 prohibits employment of children in factories etc. Article 51(e) makes it a fundamental duty of all Indian citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional and sectional diversities, to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 21 A (The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002) makes education is now a fundamental right of all children of the age of 6-14 years. A new Fundamental Duty Article 51 A (k) in part 4 makes it a duty of a parent or a guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward, as case may be, between the age of 6 & 14 years.

Directive Principles of State Policy

The Directive Principles of State Policy have been the guiding beacons for social policies and legislation. Article 39 empowers the state to direct its policy towards securing all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood and to ensure equal pay for equal work for men and women. It also develops that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused. The article further grants that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment. Article 41 deals with right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases. Article 42 enjoins the State to ensure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 44 provides for a uniform civil code for the citizen while also giving a directive to the State to provide early childhood care and education for all children till they attain the age of 6 years. Article 47 the State is further committed to raising the nutritional levels health and living standard for the people.

6.6.2 Important Committees and Commissions

- **Report of the Durgabai Deshmukh Committee on Education of Women (1959)** made comprehensive suggestions and became a policy document guiding the subsequent five year plan formulation. The need for undifferentiated curricula for both boys and girls was highlighted as also to treat education of girls as a special problem.

- **Undifferentiated curricula upheld by Hansa Mehta Committee on Differentiation of Curricula (1964); Education Commission (1964-66); National Policy of Education (1968) and reiterated strongly in the National Policy on Education 1986 (revised in 1992) and its Programme of Action.**

- **The Report of the Committee on Status of Women (CSWI) Towards Equality, 1974,** revealed a declining proportion of women in the population, low female literacy and education, higher female mortality, waning economic participation and poor representation of women in political processes.

- **Shramshakti, Report of Committee on Women in Informal Sector:** documents trials and travails of 94 percent of all women workers who are employed in the informal sector.

- **Ramamurthy Review Committee:** Towards an Enlightened Humane Society underscored the need for redistribution of educational opportunities in favour of girls belonging to rural and disadvantaged sections with adequate support services (water, fodder, fuel, child care) and also asked for 50% share for girls in educational resources.
The National Literacy Mission, set up in 1988 with the goal of attaining full literacy, i.e. a sustainable threshold level of 75 per cent by 2005, continues to follow a multi-pronged strategy to eradicate illiteracy in the country. Of 600 total districts in the country, 576 have taken up literacy work. Of these, 160 districts have been covered under the Total Literacy Campaign, 264 under the Post Literacy Campaign and 152 under the Continuing Education Scheme. More than 91.53 million people were made literate up to December 2000, 61 per cent of whom were females.

The National Mission on Elementary Education is currently engaged in the task of universalization of elementary education for all children in the age group 6-14 years by the year 2010 towards fulfilling the Constitutional commitment of providing free and compulsory education to children in this age group as a fundamental right, through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

6.6.3 Policies, Plans and Programmes

The National Policy on Education 1986 (Revised in 1992) is a major landmark in the evolution of the status of women in India. The NPE goes substantially beyond the equal opportunity and social justice approach and expects education to become an instrument of women's equality and empowerment.

Education for Women's Equality

- Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise 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 will be encouraged to take 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 stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emerging technologies. (Excerpts NPE, 1986)

The 1990s were a very special period in the evolution of the education of girls in India.

The historic National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 (revised in 1992) reiterated the Constitutional commitment to equality between sexes and gave the National system of education to play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women by fostering new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, orientation of all educational personnel. Accent was on reaching out basic education to women and girls, removal of female illiteracy and provision of special support services, setting up of time targets and effective monitoring. Further, girls were to be encouraged to take up vocational, technical and professional courses especially in non-traditional areas of study and in newly emerging technologies. Women's studies were to be promoted with a view to encouraging educational institutions to take up
Moving Towards Equality

programmes of women’s development. The states were asked to prepare their plans of action for education of girls keeping in view the Jomtien declaration, the National Plan of Action for operationalising the recommendations of the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991-2000) as also the national commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The last ten years witnessed intense EFA activities with a strong rural and gender focus, additional financial outlays for primary education, innovative girl child / people centred projects and mobilization of the communities. The national policies and programmes were designed to reach out to rural and remote areas and to the disadvantaged groups of population. The Eighth and the Ninth Five Year Plans saw education of girls and women’s empowerment as the anchor sheet for national development. As such, education of the Girl Child and women’s empowerment, inextricably linked as they are, remained the dominant themes for the 1990s and girls and women have made faster progress as we see from the literacy rates and educational participation rates. The Post NPE / Jomtien efforts in the area of girls’ education appear to be giving positive results, a major yardstick being sharp increase in female literacy levels, retention and transition of girls to successive higher levels of education.

Premier interventions made in the elementary education sector since the National Policy on Education 1986 (revised in 1992) - several schemes and programmes were launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). The scheme of Operation Blackboard (OB), Teacher Education reforms, National Programme for Nutritional Support for Primary Education, Non Formal Education, Mahila Samakhya, State specific projects in Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh, and the District Primary Education Programme in 248 low female literacy districts of 18 states are important steps towards this among others. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the newest effort of the Government of India to universalize elementary education in a mission mode. Literally meaning education for All Campaign, the SSA aims to provide useful quality education to all children in the age group 6-14 years by the year 2010. In order to signify the nation’s priority for elementary education, a National Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission is being established with the Prime minister as its chairperson and the MHRD Minister as its vice-chairperson. Conceived as a centre state partnership, the states are being requested to establish state level implementation societies with the State Chief Minister in the chair. Several states have already implemented this. Specific strategies are made to cover-out of school girls belonging to special groups like child labour, street children, adolescent girls, girls belonging to certain backward communities, children for migrating families etc.

A National Programme for Education of Girls at the Elementary level (NPEGEL) is being implemented as an amendment to the existing scheme of SSA for providing additional components for education of girls at elementary level - for girls from the under privileged / disadvantaged sections from Classes I-VIII as a separate and distinct gender Component plan of SSA. The NPEGEL will be implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average. The scheme will cover 2656 blocks as per 1991 Census that fall in this category, subject to revision after 2001 Census figures are received.

Check your Progress 4

i) What is the focus of 9th and 10th Five Year Plans?

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6.6.4 Progress of Female Literacy

All India Picture

According to the Census of India 2001, the literacy rate for the population aged seven years and more works out to be 65.38; this rate being 75.85 for males and 54.16 for females. Thus, three fourths of the males and more than half of the females (Age 7+) are literate in a population of over a billion. The overall literacy rates have gone up from 52% to 65% during 1991-2001 for population aged 7+; female literacy for this period has moved up from 39% to 54% in 2001. It is heartening to note that for the first time since independence, the absolute number of illiterates have shown a decline. The decline is as large as 31.96 million, the same being 21.45 million among males and 10.51 million among females. However, the numbers of illiterates are still huge, 296 million in all out of whom 190 million (64%) are female.

Kerala continues its lead on the literacy rate with 90.92 followed by Mizoram 88.49. Bihar has recorded the lowest literacy rate of 47.63 percent in the country. Kerala continues to retain the top spot in the country with 94.20% literacy rate for males and 87.86% for the females. Bihar has recorded the lowest literacy rate both in case of males (60.32%) and females (33.57%). Seven states / union territories have less than 50% female literacy, namely, Rajasthan (44.34%); Arunachal Pradesh (44.24%); Dadra and Nagar Haveli (42.99%); Uttar Pradesh (42.98%); Jammu and Kashmir (41.82%); Jharkhand (39.38%); and Bihar (33.57%).

The states and union territories with literacy rates below the national average are Jammu & Kashmir in North, Rajasthan and Dadra and Nagar Haveli in west, Andhra Pradesh in south, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh in the central parts, and, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya in the North Eastern part of the country. The state and union territories with literacy rates below the national average in respect of all three categories, i.e., persons, males and females, are Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Mizoram has recorded the minimum gap in male female literacy rates of 4.56 percentage points. In Kerala this gap is 6.34 percentage points and in Meghalaya it is 5.73 percentage points in 2001. It is important to note in case of Meghalaya that although the combined literacy rates in the state is below the national average, male-female literacy gaps are very small. This can perhaps be attributed to the relatively more advantageous position of women in this matrilineal society.

Male-female differentials are as high as 32.50 percentage points in Gujarat, these figures being 32.12 for Rajasthan; 30.33 point for Dadra & Nagar Haveli; and more than 20 percentage points in Uttaranchal (23.75); Haryana (23.24); Chhattisgarh (25.46); Orissa (25.02); Madhya Pradesh (26.55); Uttar Pradesh (27.30); Jammu and Kashmir (23.83); Jharkhand (29.56); and Bihar (26.80).

6.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have covered gender roles in different cultural settings and impact of socialization practices. Self concept and self esteem and their relation to creativity and independence have been explained in the unit. The other issues covered in the unit are – constitutional measures, policies and plans related to girl education and progress of female literacy so far.
6.8. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

i) Women and men acquire a set of attitudes and choices and behaviours which are consistent with the sex roles they are expected to play in the society is called as process of socialization.

ii) In some communities of Haryana women have to cover their face and should'nt see other men; like this you can list two features, which are developed by women in your community in the process of socialization.

Check Your Progress 2

i) The religion acts as an important cultural factor which reinforces the traditional perception of women as subordinate to males. Brahmanical tradition also strongly supports patriarchal culture assigning a secondary position to women.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Girls from urban middle class and even from semi urban and few rural areas are doing well in board examinations. This phenomenon can be seen across the country and gradually spreading to other levels and parts of the country.

Check Your Progress 4

i) The 9th and 10th Five Year Plans focused on education of girls and improvement of women.

6.9 SUGGESTED READING

GOI (2003), National Plan of Action on Education for All, Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, MHRD, New Delhi.