
UNIT 4 EDUCATION AND GENDER

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Learning Objectives



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

- understand historical, social context of women's education;
- comprehend the inter-linkages between gender and education;
- identify the educational reality resulting from the restrictions produced through these inter-linkages; and
- critically evaluate how these inter-linkages operate towards discrimination and exclusion of women.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the inter-linkage between gender and education. It looks at the historic evolution of educational concerns for women on the world scene as well as concerns of women's education as understood by the feminist scholars in India. The unit intends to highlight the socio-political and cultural context within which gender concerns feature in educational reality and educational experience, for women. Before we move ahead, we must understand that gender, in educational context must not be understood as a social constraint, solely, relegating

individuals as passive recipients but as performative in its essential characteristic, that is, it must be understood through. In essence, gender must be understood within the discourse of 'doing gender', such conceptualisation not only respects the agency individuals may exercise towards social change but also understands social processes as a more dynamic process evolving through participation between society, and individuals.

Before proceeding, we must understand, through conceptual engagement, how gender and education link-up.

Conceptually when we talk about doing gender what we mean, in effect, is how we actively construct and positively reinforce gendered expectations, consciously or unconsciously. As children we quickly learn the differentiation between sex categories (women and men) and actively engage with these existing set of symbols and meanings as a matter of developing a sense of self and belongingness. 'Doing gender' is intimately linked to power dynamics within the specific socio-cultural contexts. It would be wrong to assume that within this framework of power, women are oppressed and exploited. The operation of power dynamics has to be understood a little more broadly in two aspects. One, that the system reinforces and rewards conformity to gendered codes by giving power, that is, women by conforming to gendered expectations find themselves rewarded with access (even though unequal) to resources and other perks that it denies if women refuse or fail to conform to expectations, sometimes very violently. Second, the system is still an oppressive system because it restricts socio-political, economic, aesthetic choices that we may want, for instance, even if a boy wants to choose to be a home-maker, instead of earning a living the system is most contriving for making a desired choice, which may flout gendered-role expectations.

Education, works towards establishing and reinforcing gendered role expectations through various ways. It reflects the socio-cultural ideas of gendered identity for both men and women and socialises, effectively, through various means, the young into accepting, respecting, and conforming to these expectations. Education is in this way fed by, and feeds into the existing gender-disparate and restrictive-oppressive ideas of the society.

At another level, education has the potential to question and through initiating a critical enquiry, engage with existing gender disparity. It holds the potential to act as a trigger towards social change and inclusion through critical engagement, economic empowerment, and socio-political representation.

In Indian context gender inequality is related to patriarchy as an oppressive socio-cultural and historical system. Patriarchy is understood through systematic assignment of power to men over women, a systematic and cultural de-valuation of women (holding women as inferior, assigning them secondary status and lesser value than men). The system is seen as defining and enforcing different roles and behavioural codes as well as expectations from men and women. Although the roles underestimate women's potentials, limits their choices and restricts the possibilities of life; it is simultaneously seen as oppressive for men, through its unreasonable ambitious demands and strict expectations of behavioural conduct. For instance, earning livelihood is seen as an essential part of being a man, through association of earning livelihood to the roles of bread earner/provider and thus 'master'. It becomes a matter of agony, self doubt and a feeling of inferiority,

rage and frustration when men may not find themselves fulfilling the criteria. At the same point of time, it becomes a matter of shame and social backlash for men who may want to choose the role of a home-maker. Thus, in essence strict gender roles and behavioural expectations are restrictive and oppressive for both men as well as women.

The sex as biological fact and gender as cultural and social construct draws from the works of Gayle Rubin and others who furthered the argument and drew from the works of Marcel Mauss on gift societies and Claude Levi-Strauss's work on incest and taboo to explain the related phenomena of devaluation of women in these societies.

In the following sections you will see how this devaluation comes to play a significant role in determining choices and shaping experiences of women. This understanding of devaluation of women would also help us understand the educational reality in Indian context and the restricted progress we have made with respect to correcting gender imbalance in national educational scenario.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.2.1 World at a Glance

Critique of gendered inaccessibility; and nature of education for women as a gender category has a matter of quest towards educational and social justice. It has been one of the important concerns in the struggle waged by the feminist scholarship and women's movement on the world scene and in India respectively.

However, owing to differences in specific contexts, the demand for educational access and equity rose in very different ways in western civilisations as opposed to its rise in Indian contexts. When we talk about western contexts it must be understood that initial feminist scholarship demanding educational access and equity, comprised of predominantly white women, from middle class, and it must be borne clear that this scholarship could not be seen as representative of the whole western context, given that specific representation of groups of women led to subsequent evolution of constitutional provisions and socio-cultural preconditions and support for different groups of women as per their emergence and assertion for a specific differential consideration by them. These included groups like women of African-American descent, indigenous tribal women, and immigrant women and so on and so forth.

Ancient mentions of a university open to women for learning, in Islamic historical accounts goes as long back as 1859. There have been references to women's education and leadership in educational institutions and ventures, in Islamic historical accounts dating as long back as 1859. 12th and 13th century (Ayyubid Dynasty predominantly in regions that form present-day Arabic nations) records have noted women's participation in public education, funded by women, sometimes. However, women's education was not absolutely accepted and approved of. Just as historical as the accounts of women's education, is the accounts of its disapproval. Women's education faced stern resistance, but continued to exist nonetheless.

The present day European region, historical accounts of Roman empire noted women's education, although restricted to upper class women of a centurion (professional officer in Roman army in 107 BC). Wall painting of Pompeii (present day Italy) also picture present women in literary gear.

Through 13th, 14th and 15th century have mentions of women's education for only the most advantaged sections of the society, and even these remain rather patchy. Concerns about women's learning were expressed dominantly and restriction had begun being levied, in the light of increasing control being slowly but steadily shifting in the hands of the religious authorities, along with consolidation of states and formulation and re-formulation of laws for civil society.

Education for women was rare and isolated, with increasing participation of; and control by a compact nexus of state, law and religion dominated by religious authorities, Education of women kept being strictly withheld from expanding from its atomistic existence. Later part of 18th century saw concerns for women's education being raised by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) rising in the wake of The Enlightenment, and yet education for larger populations of women, education remained far from reach and imagination. In 19th century, women in higher education were ghostly, which can be understood through the very fact that Marie S. Curie (1867-1934) attained education from *flying universities* in Poland (lacking any established institutional space and constantly on-the-move to avoid being attacked or busted and arrested by authorities).

The outreach (as seen above) of education, in every historical account has always been debatable, since most accounts refer to women from advantaged social groups being initiated into education. The accounts refer to glorious but isolated, sporadic and contained phenomena of women's education, weather Islamic, ancient Europe, or ancient India, which makes it evident that education was luxury that only a selected population enjoyed access to.

The mass-reach of education to women wouldn't feature in western world up until mid-19th century, when a number of single-sex colleges began to offer education to women. Access ensured the struggle began to take account of other kinds of marginalisation and gender stereotyping of women and their educational experiences.

4.2.2 Women's Education in the Subcontinent

In Indian context, women's education exhibited the characteristic features of the scene of women's education on the world as a whole. The literary knowledge of women, in vedic ages celebrated through evoking highly isolated instances of celebrated priestesses and/or scholars were not representative of the larger social scenario. Interesting in all of these accounts however, is the clear expression of the kind of resistance, opposition and marginalisation women faced on account of being learned. (In a heated philosophical debate and deliberation, faced with a lack of appropriate answers to her questions Yajnavalkya threatens Gargi, against her speaking further, with dire consequences, Romsha, Lopamudra, Maitreyee etc are other featured as scholars in vedic texts). Another interesting point to be noted is that from amongst about 1000 hymns composed in rig veda alone, only about 27 are authored and credited to women scholars. These women form distinct examples that were not representative of women at large.

Stronghold of caste system ensured education of any kind was restricted to the reach, predominantly, of men of a certain caste group. The distinction being so stark that even the languages of communication differed for masses as against the literary caste group(s) enjoying access to written texts. Although, parallel traditions of education operated, they remained largely marginalised. Literature, history and other knowledge systems, relevant to dominated caste groups were preserved through alternative ways. How the educational access and experience of women belonging to specific caste groups differed, is a curious field of study. Although women remained marginalised by virtue of their caste group identity, it is often argued that the restrictions, faced by women on mobility and sexuality and life choices, were relatively lower in comparison to women from more advantaged caste groups. However, the social prejudices and social attitudes translated this freedom into exploitation of these women for labour and sexuality. Social position in the caste hierarchy continued to marginalise Dalit women, strictly against accessing education, since they were situated at the lowest matrix of gender and caste.

On a whole, the society, in sub-continent nonetheless, treated women as inferior, secondary subjects and thus men found themselves almost predominantly in a more advantageous position when it came to accessing any kind of knowledge.

The coming of imperial control and the consolidation of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (of today) into one colony, led to some significant changes with the challenging change initiated by the new discourse on women's education and status in the colony.

Access to public institutions of education emerged as a need in the backdrop of Imperialism against nationalist discourses. The development is best understood as disjointed, and faintly related. The specific contexts of different and starkly diverse regions within the administrative unit unified in the name of India were too distinct to be read in a continuum.

The stark differences can be understood through a quick skimming at the specifics of eastern regions of the subcontinent. This is geared towards highlighting that there existed specific and distinct manifestation yet a rather cohesive trend in women's education in the sub-continent.

Bengal (undivided) had witnessed the advent of Buddhism much later than the other parts of the subcontinent. By the time, Buddhism had entered Bengal in 16th century, much later than its 12th 13th century onwards culmination in the rest of the sub-continent. Thus, the social texture of the society was still experiencing a questioning of social hierarchies and power relations, while the rest of the sub-continent experienced reinstating of old hierarchical structures. Buddhism had done the necessary tilling, towards women's education, in Bengal something that helped towards women's accessing education faster, and more enthusiastically than any other part of the sub-continent. Southard notes in her paper that women's education in Bengal before the advent of 20th century was led by men, owing to negligible number of educated women in the society.

It is important to note, that the enthusiasm of men towards educating women was embedded within a discourse of nationalism. Women's education and social position and status became the bone of contention being the social status of women. Missionary/academic/administrative accounts at this point were arguing

in favour of the colonial regime as initiation of civilisation into an uncivilised region. The accounts pointed to the 'barbaric' social condition of women. In reaction, it caused the rise of reactionaries and revivalists. While revivalists celebrated the golden age and sought to go back to the historical legacy, arguing women were respected in a culturally specific way that westerners wouldn't be able to understand. The Reformists, mostly western educated, advocated education for women, along the idea proposed western education. A group within reformists suggested education of women must be at par with men. However, there was not unanimous agreement with respect to the nature of education that must be provided to women. Reformists, started schools, and colleges for women and encouraged their own women and other interested women to study.

There, however was disunity within reformists with regard to the nature of education that must be made available. This marked the larger trend seen across the subcontinent. Although, the western regions rose much later to the educational developments for women made by their eastern counterparts, the foundational contention was experienced by the entire subcontinent.

Since women's education rose embedded in a nationalistic discourse, it is highly unlikely that for a considerable part of the history of educational developments for women, women's welfare or education for its own sake was the actual intention.

The colonial administration remained largely un-interested in funding women's education. Female education depended much on non-governmental funding sources in the early years.

Historians noted that surpassing initial hic-cups of women's accessing education were difficult, and even when women began accessing education what they studied became a political issue.

Most initially, while it became fashionable for elite women to get educated, the only purpose of education was to make them eligible as smart and intelligent companions to their progressive husbands. The education was tailored to appreciate their roles as wives without challenging the dominant gender roles expectations. Fashionable, as it was for the women belonging to elite sections of society, given the restriction of purdah, only women from less-advantaged sections of society accessed reformist interventions in public education, first. And yet, however, the higher education was usually off limits, irrespective of the social standing.

The matter of education was another contentious issue, with most nationalist leaders convinced that education of women should and must not be allowed to interfere with their gendered roles as wives and daughters, in fact, it was argued that education of women must be geared towards helping them in performing their expected roles as house-keepers and mothers and wives with greater efficiency. Thus, education even though allowed for women remained rather unchallenging of the social status quo and the gendered hierarchy.

Sardar Dayal Singh, speaking on behalf of the Indian Association of Punjab, stated "the object of female education in this country is not to make sound scholars but to make better mothers, sisters and wives".

Girls should be taught suitable subjects and “not be made to swallow history and geography indiscriminately”, opined Lahore Arya Samaj.

Up until 1920, the participation of Indian Christians and Parsis was much higher than that of Hindus, and it was the lowest among Muslims, It still remains somewhat skewed.

4.3 EDUCATION AND GENDER

The key to understanding the access to education and subsequent educational experience of women in India, is to understand the cultural-religious view of women, the culturally specific gender role expectations communicated through Biological Differences, Structural Constraints, Social Interaction, Socio-cultural Reproduction or Gender Socialisation and Gender Schemas. All the various theories parallel existed, gained and lost significance owing to numerous factors.

It is important to understand that no theory can be claimed to have vanished or completely rejected as obsolete. The tenets of these theories surface and re-surface in various aspects of educational praxis, however their legitimacy at explaining the relationship must be subjected to critical evaluation and analysis. A plethora of studies and researches (primarily gaining importance and popular support) attributed differential educational representation in educational representation and educational choices on the basis of natural-sexual differences. Biological differences gained respect and legitimacy from traditional religious-cultural thoughts that influenced studies, which in turn drew from scientific evidences motivated by the same religious-cultural assumptions about women and men’s differential abilities as an attribute of their biological differences. Erik Erickson’s work (1970-80) is significant in arguing biological basis as determinant of differential developmental projectiles and abilities.

Meanwhile, early liberal Feminist thought, arguing against any significant biological differences beyond those of procreation, actively sought through studies to either discount gender specific differences in educational talents and abilities (Nihilen, 1975), or, made an overzealous attempt to prove the supremacy of one sex over the other (Draper,1975) . The studies and findings within this stream of thought came under scrutiny on the basis of biological essentialism and rejection of the role of environmental constraints.

Box 4.2

Gender Schema Theory: Gender schemas refer to the system of symbols that are imbibed and assimilated by an individual to develop an understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Schemata or network of information pertaining to gendered identity are established and reinforced by the society. The cognition of an individual interacts with these schemas and constructs the knowledge about this system of information to attempt and acquire the essential schemata

With the increased fervor of Socialist and Radical Feminist thought, studies and researches shifted focus to structural constraints as explanatory of differences in educational attainment and choices. This stream of thought focused on the role of environment as constraining the educational ability, expression and educational representation. This stream asserted ways in which gender roles interact with

social institutions, structures, and processes and how human groups use gender to organise roles, statuses, norms, and values. It examined the ways in which institutions of family, schools socialise gender appropriate behaviour and role-expectations. Goetz and Grant (1988) observe,

“Shalinsky’s (1980) examination of the acquisition of gender identities in Afghanistan, for example, focuses on how family structure perpetuates gender roles across generations. Because girls’ education resides in the family, especially with the mother, Shalinsky suggests that the strength of the mother-daughter bond assures social replication across generations. This continues the earlier focus on social structures as the locus of traditional roles and expectations. Dobbert (1975), for example, had observed that in school boys are assigned manipulative jobs while girls are given nurturant tasks. This complementary division is reinforced by boys’ being encouraged to lead and act, whereas girls are encouraged to follow and watch.”

Structural constraints assert unadulterated perpetuation of gender roles through socialisation. However, socialisation is not absolute, complete and unadulterated. Socialisation does not reproduce exact gender dynamics, however, the socialisation theories fail to account or respect human agency. Gender socialisation theory assumed a certain amount of passivity among women and men in their identity formation. It examined and illuminated the various ways through which a culture of gender identity precedes an individual’s existence and determines roles and behaviour for the individual. Socialisation theories suggest, sex-typing or assigning meaning to a person by virtue of their sexual identity begins very early on, in and through family. School becomes the second greatest locale of influence. Education thus consolidates the individual experiences of young children and ascribes meaning to it, towards formation of the sex-category identity.

The next significant development that happened was the coming of Gender Schema Theory that included human agency as well as structural stimuli towards shaping of experiences. Social interactions gained importance. Gender Schema Theory draws from the constructivist paradigm of psychology and asserts that sex typing derives in part, from gender based schematic processing, much in line with the general information processing that human mind entails as a part of growing up. The theory suggests that sex typing is resultant of the fact that self-concept itself gets assimilated to the gender schema. It draws heavily from constructivist idea of information processing done by an individual through active engagement with the stimuli provided by the environment.

The elements of all the above threads of feminist thought get reflected in part or whole in various aspects of educational praxis and policy in Indian context, which we shall see, in forthcoming sections.

4.3.1 Gender-Education Connect

Education connects with gender prejudices prevalent in a society through various ways. It usually performs a number of functions to establishment and reinforcement of the existing sex-typing and gender socialisation (Box 1.). This work inter-connectively and in a mutual manner as follows:

- 1) Education becomes a tool for perpetuation through implicit or explicit gender socialisation through textbooks. For example, a number of studies have revealed that school textbooks, in many cases, project women characters as

passive, docile, emotionally vulnerable, fickle minded, and incapable of leadership, while observing that women are usually assigned roles that are nurturing, caring, and motherly.

- 2) Educational experiences, given largely gender-uncritical nature of school teachers, who carry with themselves to school, the larger socio-cultural perception of girls, boys, their talents and abilities, which shapes their perceptions and attitudes towards students respectively. This then influences their expectations, the efforts they put in and also the self concept among both boys and girls.
- 3) The lack of role models, support and reinforcements for women make it challenging for women, to perform at par, or even sustain themselves in a system that does not support or reinforce women's participation.
- 4) The gender-role attitudes and expectations that women face in their lives outside educational institutions impose restrictions on educational goal-aspirations, attainments, performance, in effect influencing women's educational experiences.
- 5) The Socio-cultural and religious meaning assigned to being a member of sex-category of women, also imposes restrictions on the educational resources (investment of time, money, mentoring, help, care and effort), choices and possibilities made available to women.

Thus systemic constraints impose restrictions that women actively engage with and constantly negotiate with in order to advance educationally.

4.3.2 Women, Gift and Incest

To understand the other forms of manifestation one must begin the analysis with the understanding of socio-cultural devaluation of women in the Indian society, broadly. The analysis that helps in this regard is the analysis of two major theorists of anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss.

Combining their works on incest taboo and gift society respectively we can understand the kind of anxiousness society has about women's unsupervised mobility and freedom. Education can easily be seen as a tool for freedom of expression and thinking, and thus, it may come to challenge or inspire a critical reflection of women of their own lives. Together, they constitute the rationale of women's devaluation. Elaborate incest taboo (rules governing possible networks of socially permissible sexual relationships) viewed women as a valued gift that is promised and exchanged between men of specific social groups, as a mark of the mutual relationship between specific groups. Exchange happens against the backdrop of a greater feeling of solidarity between various groups and clans and as a symbol representing their utmost regard and respect for this solidarity and as a token to convey allegiance towards their own group. The grandeur marking marriages are a way of celebrating the upholding of this solidarity and its public declaration and reinforcement.

In larger parts of India, fathers give away their daughters, although, as you may have read there are alternate kinship patterns assigning this power to different men of the family, for instance, it could be maternal uncle or brother.

Thus, there is anxiety and strictness surrounding women's mobility and sexuality, especially. Since the incest taboo is very elaborate and works through complex networks there is a stronger sense of restrictions on women. Further, as in most cases, in larger Indian social scenario, with marginal variation, there is a hierarchy between wife-givers and wife-takers, with the reigning belief that wife givers are socially inferior to the wife takers. This rule translates into giving of dowry, the anxiety against having a girl child, as a matter of loss of social power, and thus, leading to sex-selective termination of pregnancy and infanticide.

The woman since is seen as a valuable gift, she's perceived as owned by her husband and since women serve a specific purpose in family setup and society at large, through their exchangeability in marriage, as an adhesive to hold social bonds together, marriages gain superimposing consideration in the bringing up and socialisation of a girl child. Women are barely appreciated as an independent individual by herself or even allowed to develop herself into an individual, individuated and independent. Women are initiated into values of relations and associations, socialised towards developing a sense of embedded selves (in relation to everyone, and keeping herself last). Passivity, nurturance, obedience, meekness are thus the values seen as coherent with the larger understanding of women's role in society and thus they're aptly socialised. The choices, investments and attitudes pertaining to women, reflect the view of consideration of their eventual marriage and their successful exchange.

It is important, however, to remember that education must be envisioned as a longitudinal social project that must be geared towards addressing the historical wrong done on various historically disadvantaged groups, women being one such group. Education must be seen as an empowerment project that works in view of long term benefits instead of only short term returns. Thus, when we discuss how education must make not just re-evaluation to redress the prejudices carried forth, historically but also re-adjust itself to ensure that women, as a group be judged against the backdrop of a long history of exclusion, discrimination, subjugation and oppression; and be given special consideration for inclusion in the reaping of returns from education.

4.4 GENDER GAP IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS: REASONS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.4.1 The Existing Gap in Educational Access and Attainment

There has been an overall increase in literacy rate of the country from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% in 2001. Female literacy during this period has shown an optimistic growth of 14.87% as opposed to the 11.72% growth in male literacy, in the period of 1991-2001, a comparative high of 3.15%. However, this must be seen in relation to the overall rise in population in the country.

India however, has the worst female literacy rate, with only about half its entire female population, up to the age of 7 years, literate, a total of 53.67%. The differences in female literacy rates among the states are also extreme with Kerala having the highest female literacy rate of 87.72%, followed by Mizoram (86.75%). A contrast emerges from the picture provided by other states that have female literacy rates as low as 33.12% in Bihar and 38.87% in Jharkhand.

An interesting picture is presented by the dropout rates of the girl students at various levels. In 2005-2006, drop rate at primary level of boys was 28.53 % as against 21.54% of girls. At the secondary level, it amounted to 60.04% for boys and 63.56% for girls. The spatial variation in dropout rates for girls was stark. In Bihar and Rajasthan, as many as 45.25% and 45.94% of the girls dropped out at primary level and 85.64% and 81.80% girls dropped out respectively, before they could complete secondary education. In Kerala, on the other hand, dropout rates at primary level were 0 %, for both boys and girls and the dropout rate for boys was higher (7.44%) than that of girls (2.42%) at the secondary level.

Girls' enrollment in education has, although, seen a broad trend increase over time at all levels of education, it continues to lag behind that of boys. In 2001-02, girls' enrolment remained below 50 per cent of total enrolment at the primary school level. This percentage of girls' enrolment goes down to 18.7% as one goes higher up at the secondary level, which indicates that more than 30% girls drop out before reaching secondary education.

The number of girls per 100 boys in primary and secondary education clears the picture on gender disparity; there were 87 girls at the primary level, which decreased to 81 and 72 at the secondary and higher secondary levels respectively in 2005-2006. Inter-state disparity was glaring in this respect as Table 4.1 reflects:

Table 4.1: No. of Girls/100 Boys (2005-2006)

States	Primary	Middle	Secondary and Higher Secondary
Bihar	70	68	47
Uttar Pradesh	85	70	58
Rajasthan	85	61	46
Kerala	90	92	100
Mizoram	94	97	98
India	87	81	72

Source: Abstracts, Selected Educational Statistics (2005-2006), Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education.

One must read and understand these figures as indicative of access to education, representative yet not descriptive of the subjective educational experience of women or the structural constraints experienced by women in life outside school that restrict their participation in education.

4.4.2 Out-of-school Reasons for the Gap

Since social stratification works as a matrix of cross sections of various forms of stratification like caste, class, gender, ethnicity, region, religion. It must be read in its true cross-sectional nature of existence, that is, various levels of stratification interact to produce a distinct experience of social stratification. Say while, a prosperous, propertied Brahmin Hindu man, would reap the benefits by virtue of his caste, class as well as gender, amplifying his powers as well as choices and resources, a poor, dalit girl would stand at the base of the matrix of social stratification with her oppression being amplified by virtue of her class, caste and gender.

Women in their lives outside school experience constraints imposed by factors that operate in mutually appreciative and interactive manner. The socio-cultural devaluation, seeks sanctions from religion (largely dominated by men). Women in Indian society are viewed as liability, in their native homes. As explained earlier women have social equivalence to valuable gifts tying various social groups in bonds of affinity. Women are viewed as not of any significance by themselves but in relation to the men they are exchanged between, as a result, women in broad Indian context are viewed as secondary to their male counterparts. Resource allocation and entitlement reflects this foundational belief that women of the family are '*Paraya Dhan*' (a valuable that is to be given away, *in marriage*) thus,

- 1) Educational expenses that are incurred for a girl child's education are seen as expenditure as opposed to the view that son's education is investment, as a result comparatively, women access sub-standard options in education with the view of restricting expenditure.
- 2) The view that women have no individual significance feeds into an expectation of certain amicable, devotional submission from women. This gets reflected not only in the choices women make of leading a life that is in appreciation to that of their respective men but in daily matters of behaviour, that have indirect but significant effects on educational experiences of women. For instance, eating habits in north Indian households habituate women of the family to eat last, in situation where food may be scarce or men of the family eat more than usual, the food share of women would suffer, as a result of which the nutritional intake of women is noted to be much worse than that of men.
- 3) The expectation of women to be appreciative of a man's life, clan and choices coupled with clear demarcation of home domain as that of women and extension of responsibility of care and nurturance in view of women's reproductive roles works together towards producing a very specific kind of restriction. Women are expected to compensate for themselves, in lieu of whatever little (in comparison to the sons of the same family) is done for them, in material and immaterial ways. Through services made to the household, women symbolically justify their inclusion into what is dominantly believed to be a man's. Thus, as Malvika Karlekar (2003) observes women remain outsiders in their conjugal homes and work in ways to reinstate their allegiance to the family, and justify their inclusion. Thus the anxiety of successful inclusion of daughters into their conjugal homes dominate the concerns of the natal families as well in effect, causing what can be called training/socialisation towards better and sooner successful inclusion of women in conjugal homes. Thus, a considerable load of managing household chores falls upon women, in addition women are expected to assume and successfully master the maternal roles, acting effectively as surrogate mothers in absence of mothers (in poor households where they may be earning to gather resources), or as supplementing efforts.
- 4) Sexuality is a significant concern with respect to women, partly the reason behind curtailment and surveillance of women's mobility. The anxiety with respect to women's sexuality and sexual independence can be understood in two ways. First way links it to the classical conception of women as 'gift'

where a woman's sexuality is passed from its patron, that is, the father and/or brother or maternal uncle, to the owner, that is the husband, symbolised through various rituals in marriages. Thus a woman's sexuality, virginity and chastity are held as symbols of allegiance between social groups, leaving her individual choice irrelevant and unnecessary. Read as the honour (*izzat*) of the family and clan, in view of ensuring a successful marital exchange, a woman's sexuality becomes a reason for imposing restrictions on her life, mobility and choices. As a result enormous emphasis comes to rest upon her mobility stemming from the anxiety surrounding sexual freedom and choice. This is crucial to understanding the higher rate of drop out of girls when the distance between school and homes increase or at the onset of puberty. Another interesting explanation is offered by Mary E. John who argues that the idea of purity in many cultures (predominantly Hinduism) expresses deep set anxiety and concern with respect to the orifices of the body. Drawing from her analysis, female genitalia is a passage inside, while the same doesn't hold true for male genitalia, which is more intrusive/penetrating, thus the conception that a woman's body can be violated and made 'impure'.

As a result women face a greater struggle to reach school and to continue till graduating. The out-of-school pressures impact, not just women's performance and efficiency but their very retention in education till school-graduation.

4.5 GENDERED EDUCATION: SCHOOLS AS SITES OF GENDER SOCIALISATION

Education is never neutral and knowledge is always value-laden and can either maintain or challenge the hegemonic order, sometimes simultaneously (Freire, 1972; Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2002). Educational institutions represent and establish social codes, teachers and heads of the institutions, bring along with them, to the classroom their uncritical socialisation and social profile specific common sense. These prove to be detrimental to the experience of women in education. Gender stereotypes get reinforcements and get reiterated through such uncritical attitudes in curricular texts and through teachers. Gendered assumptions govern not only behaviour, and attitudes but directly or indirectly comes to influence goal-expectation, gender-role expectation, available role-models for girls, systemic efforts at sustaining and retaining girl child, girls self-conception of their own ability and efforts.

4.5.1 Gendered Environment at School

Schools as institutions reflect social segregation on the basis of gender, and caste. A number of studies point out how schools are insensitive to the experiences of a girl child outside the schools. In this section we focus on how lack of structural supports due to lack of appreciation of the structural constraints on women outside schools, is likely to affect education of girl children. The lack of sanitation facilities or commuting facility is more likely to affect the retention of girls in the school, especially post-puberty. Similarly, given the anxiety surrounding unrelated men dominated spaces as a threat to 'izzat' girls are far more likely to drop out of school due to lack of female teachers at school. The lack of female teachers at school is also likely to impact the girl child, since it would mean the absence of any concrete, role models to reinforce performance, effort and retention.

4.5.2 Gendered Attitudes

Although presence of female teachers at schools is likely to boost enrolment it is not a guarantee of retention and an empowering experience of education for the girl child. Female teachers may carry with them uncritical perpetuation of gender stereotypes prevalent in the larger society to the classroom. So, in essence teacher's uncritical gender ideas may reflect in various ways like:

- 1) Teachers assign non-curricular tasks based on gendered understanding of female and male bodies. Say, tasks that require physical strength like shifting of furniture would be given to male students, while tasks requiring monotonous repetition or nimble fingers would inevitably go to female students, like decorating the classroom etc.
- 2) The gendered perception of teachers also influence the verbal praising and/or reinforcement they would give to students of a gender category performing tasks traditionally considered to be in the domain of the other gender category. While teachers would reinforce gender appropriate tasks performance they are more likely to discourage a crossing over. Girls would be encouraged, on an average, more than boys for doing well at, say, sewing lessons, while boys would be encouraged more and pushed more for physical training lessons.
- 3) Such gendered perceptions may also reflect in the curricular opportunity and offers teachers may extend to their students. For instance, giving opportunities to write on the chalkboard in certain subjects reinforcing gendered perception of subjects.
- 4) Teachers often in their interactions but verbal and physical pay great respect to the gendered perception of children. For instance, rowdy and rough behaviour may be tolerated more and expected more from boys while on the other hand girls may be punished less severely for an equivalent offense.
- 5) Teachers/authorities at school may engage in explicit gender socialisation through negative reinforcement of behaviour considered by them (through their uncritical internalisation of their own gender socialisation), gender-inappropriate. Aspects such as walking, talking, laughing, and/or sitting inappropriately may come to provoke explicit gender socialisation through invocation of gender norms, unstated but agreed upon by a society.

4.5.3 Gendered Educational Experience

Students as well as teachers carry with themselves to school, cultural mores, values and norms dominant in the society at large, reinforcing gender inequality and prejudices.

Teachers, in previous as well as next section have been analysed for the way they participate in perpetuation of gender inequality and prejudices through non-curricular non-pedagogic interaction with children, or explicit intentional socialisation. Teachers also, are interpreters of a curricular text; hence their role in perpetuation of gender injustice manifests itself by means of their pedagogies, through their gendered translations of the text, in cases where the texts are gender just. In cases where the curriculum maybe itself, perpetuating gender injustice, as explained below, a teacher's uncritical attitude is more than enough to do the damage.

Peers are important and significant contributors to perpetuation of gender injustice. Peers actively scrutinise, supervise and check gender inappropriate behaviour. Peers act through internalised socialisation they receive to check and socialise their other peers, especially younger peers.

Curriculum is highly significant in the perpetuation and promotion of gender socialisation. *Nirantar(2009)* makes an elaborate analysis of the ways in which gender socialisation comes to manifest itself and perpetuate gender injustice through textbooks. Textbooks are often loaded with the subtexts that work in implicit ways to pay respect to gendered prejudices, prevalent in larger society. For instance, stories in literature had a strongly skewed ratio of stories with women as protagonists. Almost no stories depicted women in roles that may be aggressive, roles of leadership, explorers, or any other roles seen as masculine traits. Women were shown as nurturing, caring, empathetic weak, submissive, and passive roles.

Curriculum is a crucial to learning, as children may pick not only role models but they learn to relate to their own lives as well through texts. Gender prejudiced texts are likely to, if not single handedly, influence a girl's education negatively.

4.5.5 Gendered Choices

Various studies have noted that gender differences are institutionalised through repeated reinforcement at school level. The various factors work in a dynamic ways to restrict choices and segregate them into gendered categories. This kind of restriction of choice pays respect to gendered understanding of abilities, appropriate domains of activity and power equation between women and men. Thus, subjects that are tool-use-intensive and are likely to reap greater economic-social rewards, thereby ensuring greater power in gender relations are seen as male domain. These subjects witness unusually high concentration of boys opting for these subjects and also qualifying for them. It is interesting to note that these subjects also are popular. The popularity-socio-economic returns-engendering must be read as a phenomena occurring through a dynamic interaction between the three and not in linearity. Subjects that are more popular, have better job prospects and are likely to yield greater social prestige and/or has leadership potential and/or is associated with higher pay-back, get dominated by males. In return, in a somewhat circular logic, the higher concentration of men becomes an implicit rationale behind all of the above said becoming associated with the job. The same circular logic works in the case of women, that is, because it is done by women, it is paid less, and because it is paid less, women finds them doing it.

This kind of phenomena is usually read as lack of necessary qualification and merit in girls can be understood better through the way the choices come to manifest themselves as largely a male or female domain. Through differential expectations from girls and boys with regard to their performance in say, mathematics, through greater positive reinforcement of a better performance, through explicit mentoring of students into choosing subjects that are gender-expectation appropriate, through gender-differential intellectual and economic effort invested in a student's learning process, not just by the school authorities, teachers but also by parents, this kind of gender difference is reproduced.

4.5.6 Implications

Women face unequal life situations that inhibit their potential of accessing education as well as experiencing it and reaping returns of educational qualifications. In out of school life women face an unnatural curbing of their natural child like agility, are cultured into being submissive and passive. Their life situations become restricting to their educational prospects.

Not only does this mean that half of our population could not be developed as a human resource, but also that women in particular have not been able to actualise their potential. Since female literacy has a lot do with levels of fertility and mortality, nutritional status, earning capacity and her own independence within and outside home, it would take more than just isolated efforts to sustain women into education long enough for it to empower them economically, and personally.

4.6 WAY AHEAD: RE-EVALUATION AND RE-EXAMINATION

Gender, like all other concepts, is neither fixed nor static. The understanding of what gender is, has been changing, with and through; political, social and cultural movements providing the necessary impetus towards its re-definition. The re-defining, then calls upon a re-examination of how gender comes to reflect in socio-cultural processes as restricting or discriminating principle. Gender discourse in Indian context needs such a re-evaluation to evolve out of its neat bipolar conceptualisation of the world into two sex categories (Zimmermann), and re-examine how this conception has been at the foundation of newer forms of exclusion and discrimination of the populations on this basis.

It is important here to understand that defining a concept, and its subsequent usage and inclusion into socio-cultural discourses in a fixed manner lays the foundation of exclusion and discrimination. For instance, the initial conception of what constituted 'Rape' could not account for marital rape, since non-consented sex could not be understood in an obligatory sexual relationship, that stood at the foundational understanding of marriages in more than one cultural and social contexts.

Through the first three waves of feminist movement, the understanding of gender remained largely concentrated around two foundational beliefs, first being, the bipolar (divided into two neat halves), something Foucault(1979; 1980) called *Dimorphic or two-sex model* conceptualisation of gender, that is gender concerns being reflecting an engagement with the world as constitutive of men and women only. Related is the second foundational belief which Adrienne Rich (1980; published in her book in 1986) termed *Compulsory Heterosexuality*. She argued that, the feminist scholarship in its earlier conceptualisations reflected an unsettling agreement about the 'natural' affinity between the two sexes. The two very interrelated points came to challenge, the conceptualisation of male domination, put into place by the works of Gayle Rubin(1975), and Kate Millet(1977).

Indian context largely reflects this understanding in its institutional setups and in educational, political, social, cultural, religious and to a large extent even the legal discourse, with little or no contestation. Gender concerns in Indian context

took the form of women's movement making a clear departure from feminist thought, standing itself apart from western scholarship. The argument presented stressed the distinct nature of society and emphasised as well as evolved from social activism as opposed to theoretical engagement as in western context.(Chaudhuri, 2004). However, the male domination and socio-cultural devaluation stands at the basis of all arguments raised by women's movement in India. It is interesting to note that the very conceptualisation, although drawing from urgent need for social activism, is a *Women's movement* not *Gender Rights movement*. The point of emphasis being that the origin and conceptualisation reflected the idea developed by Rubin, to explain historical devaluation and oppression of women in societies. It drew from Rubin's analysis of anthropological works of Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss (explained in introduction). The conceptualisation came to be challenged in the wake of the arguments contesting against the two-sex theory and compulsory affinity between them.

This kind of conceptualisation had paid little or no attention to a systemic oppression the idea of masculinity imposed on men, and the immense exclusion, marginalisation experienced by homosexual, queer, transgender and inter-sexed people. However, this re-definition caused a re-evaluation of gender as a system that is oppressive to sexual identities and sexualities. The changed understanding came to reflect in re-evaluations of the kind of discrimination such defining had led to, in various socio-cultural, institutional and systemic setups. Educational context, content, praxis and educational experiences thus saw a renewed zeal to re-examine imposition of role expectations to fit into dimorphic sex-categories, causing marginalisation of sexual identity and sexualities.

Such a re-examination is impending in Indian context, the primacy of social activism has resulted in a rather restricted but significant expression and representation of rights and demands by the multiple sexual identities and sexualities. However, translating a successful politico-social and legal representation into the necessary impetus towards critical re-evaluation and restructuring of educational context and experience would take significant time and effort.

4.7 SUMMARY

Education has been defined and guarded by the advantaged sections of the society. At any point in the course of human history, education, as defined by the socially dominating groups has been assigned social prestige and cultural-economic-political rewards. Education is seen as a matter of heritage that is kept in exclusive custody of the dominant sections. As a result, women globally have found themselves struggling to attain their rightful access to education. Women have continued to oppose exclusion from accessing and manipulating/evaluating and evolving education to be more inclusive and representative of women's reality.

Indian context has carried forth its legacy of cultural devaluation of women. Women, being assigned a status of gift exchanged between men, assigns them little significance of their own. As a result culturally, women face greater pressure to be '*useful to men*'. Such a preoccupation as a precondition to constrained access to resources, limits women's life choices and lifestyles. The daily routines as an appreciation of the life of associated men leaves women with very unfair conditions to battle against in order to access and perform in educational spaces.

At the same point of time, women's educational experiences are is anything, reproductive of the unfair social order increasing the social handicap that women face.

Conceptualisation of gender dynamics is crucial to understanding women's situation in socio-political and thus educational contexts. With increased contestations to the conceptualisation of gender dynamics, globally, we face the need to re-evaluate women's position in the greater matrix of sexualities and their inter-relating dynamics.

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Suggested Readings

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- 1) How are gender inequalities created and reproduced within and around contemporary schools, and in wider society?
- 2) In what ways does the culture and society inhibit the educational access to women?
- 3) Analyse the influence of marriage-concerns on a girl's education.
- 4) Contrast the out-of-school experiences for girls and boys, and its impact on their educational possibilities.

