

A Study of Bridging Gender Gap in India by Providing Gender Education at School Level

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Abstract

The Education System of India has always been a great source of imparting equitable and value-based education. Primary Level of schooling is the base of education system as children start going to school formally for the first time. School is the place where we learn, understand and familiar with multiple identity structures in terms of Gender, Caste, Class, Sexual orientation etc. It is where a child whatever learns, becomes a strong belief for entire life which in turns shape her thinking, behavior and attitude. Thus the knowledge which is provided in school must not discriminatory and binary. The present research paper tries to draw attention on such issues which have been neglected from the very beginning in Indian education system. Hence the aim of this paper is to suggest inclusion of Gender Education in school curriculum at early stage of schooling so that a gender-neutral inclusive environment could be developed within school and outside.

Keywords: Gender Gap, Inclusion, Gender Education, School Level.

Gender Gap: In this paper Gender Gap refers to the gap in any area between men, women and third gender in terms of their level of educational representation, participation, and access to school education, rights and other benefits.

Gender Education: Gender Education includes the knowledge of gender differences (physiological and psychological), sexual orientation, achievements, failure and hardships of third gender (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer) alongside male and female.

Inclusion: Inclusion stands for participation of all students in the knowledge landscape. Nobody is lagging behind with reference to gender, sex and sexuality.

School Level: In this paper School Level includes the very basic classes from class 1 to 8.

Introduction

“Sex is what you are born with, gender is what you recognize and sexuality is what you discover.” (A. Chettiar)

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We see everything from binary lens. At every stage we categories each things into two arrangements like, a day comprise of only light and darkness, emotions comprises of only happiness and sadness the sky and the ground, the dry and the wet, the real and the unreal, the right and the left, life and death, and many more oxymoron's develop a sense of completeness, wholeness, containmement and satisfaction. Still, we feel incomplete and dissatisfied because our sub-conscious hints at the dawn, the indifference, the horizon, the moisture, the surreal, the centre and the nominal space of confusion. The present paper is focused on often ignored but equally important section of mankind. If you go back to the history and read old manuscripts you must find warriors like Shikhandi who played a remarkable role in the victory of Mahabharata. In Roman mythology, deities like Hermaphroditus, who is called as embedded personality and gave the definition of non-binary love. Malik Kafur, a close friend of Alauddin Khilji helped him for annexation of the other empires. And at present there is living example of transgender Mahamandaleshwar Laxmi Naryan Tripathi who is a graduate and also a Bharatnatyam Dancer working towards the upliftment of Transgender community. We have another example of recently appointed two transgender medical officers named Ruth John Paul and Prachi Rathore at Osmania General Hospital Telangana. All the above mentioned examples have proved that they belong to the powerful persons of majority of the world, that is the only two well defined gender categories, but what about those people who are ignored from the rights of being the part of co-operation, co-ordination and competition just because they do not come under the binary categories. The majority of individuals really forget that human life is just not about speciation but also thinking. All humans are unique and knowledgeable in their own way, they can be the producer of knowledge, forerunner of culture, creator and initiator of ideas and transformer of science and arts, but firstly, they all have to be treated equally as others irrespective of their caste, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Classroom is the place where students come to know about differences in physiological structures of human beings which shapes their psychological structure towards them. We should realize that for children to grow up in a complex, multicultural and sophisticated society, more issues of diversity should be discussed in the classroom and should be included in the curriculum. One aspect of diversity that often goes unstudied in Indian schools is Gender Education which includes third genders like- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer other than male and female.

Need for inclusion of Gender Education in school curriculum:

Research shows that before to the age of six nearly 85% of a child's brain develops, which indicates the proper care and nourishment of the brain in the early period in order to ensure healthy brain development and growth. We are living in the 21st century where the roles and status of gender is changing drastically. In this era we are also talking about third gender issues in our daily life. It is the need of hour that these topics should be included in school curriculum so that students may aware of such issues which plays a key role at the age of Adolescence because Adolescence is known as the stage of stress and storm" (Stanley hall). It is an exciting, encouraging and identity developmental stage of life. Child experiences a lot of changes (physical, mental, biological, psychological, sociological, emotional etc) during this stage that should be addressed. It could be an appropriate time to teach them hidden topics that are rarely discussed in the classroom or withheld by teachers, parents and elders. It is difficult for teenagers to understand their own feelings and emotions so they approach their parents,

teachers, peer and elders for the help. Due to lack of proper guidance and education they may suffer from identity crisis, gender desensitization, state of confusion, homophobia, hypertension, depression, stress, anxiety, role confusion, bullying, insanity, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, molestation, excessive masturbation vague feelings of being different may result in isolation and sometime they commit suicide. Due to lack of ignorance it leads to crime and many more anti-social activities in the society. It is important for these teens to gain a sense of universality, to not feel alone but to feel accepted and understood (Bass & Kaufman, 1996). In a case study of Rajarshi Chakraborty, who later identified himself as transgender after going through lots of ignorance and thinking of committing suicide because of non-acceptance of his feeling by the society. By providing support and open discussion in the classroom, this sense of universality can be obtained. Past researches also shows the importance of inclusion of these issues in school curriculum, which are as follows: Clelia Della Rovere Proia (2016) in her study found that there is an urgent need of inclusion of third gender issues in school curriculum to remove the hatred and ignorance of male and female towards other gender. David Geyer (2017) also suggested that school curriculum frameworks should be updated to include LGBT units to provide all students proper knowledge and sympathy for them. Hoffman (2001) illustrated that the perspectives of teachers faced with the issue of including gay and lesbian topics in the classroom, and determined the reasons behind their decisions. All of the teachers shared feelings of uncertainty and caution about discussing gay and lesbian issues in their Teachers' Perceptions classrooms. Nicholas (2020) in his studies found that LGBTQ youth experienced harassment/victimization in the beginning of elementary school, also there were discriminatory policies and practices that were marginalizing LGBTQ youth in the beginning of elementary school, on the other hand the LGBTQ students experienced support and positive environment in school which were only for LGBTQ students which had supportive educators, staff and friends.

Barrier of Inclusion of Gender Education in School Curriculum

Gender Education has always been a controversial area of the curriculum.

Patriarchy and Hetronormative attitude of the society: Brahmanical patriarchy and Hetronormative people totally reject the idea of homonormativity and do not value other genders which lead to the disapproval of inclusion and mainstreaming.

Androcentrism: It can be defined as male standpoint in the society. Superiority of men over women. As Mrinal Pande writes "to control women it becomes necessary to control the womb of a women" here Control is the key-word to understand the patriarchal mentality or androcentric word. Reproduction Power and decision making power are in the hands of man. Women and other genders are considered as subordinate.

Political forbiddance: Indian constitution has given each one of us equal rights such as legal rights, political rights and social rights which is written in the preamble of Indian constitution and practicing by Central government. Article 15 of Indian constitution prohibited discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, sex, gender, race etc. But the grass root reality is different from what has been said and expected.

Religious refusal: India is a country of great cultural significance. It is where religious and matrimonial practices perform in every nook and corner of the society where people worship Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati as a couple and don't challenge the authority of law even if they also worship Ardhanarishwara (Male Genitalia and Female Genitalia/ combination of shiva and shakti) which is the mixture of both sexes. Societies are afraid of talking on homosexuality because it can challenge the marriage institutions, Child birth etc.

Lack of Strong Framework: Our education system does not have any structured courses and materials on such topics which can be imparted to the students responsibly.

School climate: Orthodox and Strict climate of school premises does not allow open discussion in the classroom about sex, gender, sexuality. Unwelcoming behavior of school personnel and students make them (other gender) feel excluded and a thing of mockery.

Verbal appellation and Canalization: Family, peer- group society and schools are the informal and formal agencies of Gender Socialization from where a child learns to live. These agencies contribute indispensable role in child rearing. Addresses like - Boys are brave and girls are weak. Boys don't cry like girls. These are gender discriminatory sentences which can destroy a natural coming emotion of the child. A taboo that boys can't play with dolls or girls can't play with guns still exists that is hindrance to the natural occurring interest of a child. Sometimes these derogatory comments are used for third gender like – ‘dekho dekho chhakka jar raha hai’, ‘two in one jar raha hai.’, which humiliate them at large.

Teacher's Awareness: It is said that ignorance is bliss but sometimes it is not. Teachers themselves are ignorant. In the books of teacher training there is little information about gender and sex but there is not compulsory course in B.Ed. Curriculum of pre-service or in-service teacher training programme to make them better understand of such issues. It is the biggest drawback in inclusion.

Suggestion for Inclusion of Gender Education in School Sphere

As it is said, *"The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance."* (Socrates)

School Curriculum: An organized and structured framework should be designed on gender issue. It can be achieved by introducing a new curriculum same as- Patriotic curriculum and happiness curriculum which are recently implemented in Delhi schools. As the child grows curriculum transaction strategies should also be changed. For example, when the child is in initial stage they should be taught such issues in the form of story-telling and pictorial representation and in upper classes a whole chapters based on gender issues or a separate book which is dedicated to the life sketches and Autobiographies of famous personalities will be taught.

Teacher Training: Teachers are the backbone of Indian education system as they shape and mould the future of children and the nation. Hence, teachers need training in high-quality content as well as pedagogy related to Gender Education. So National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education must include gender education as separate and compulsory subject in BTC, B.Ed. Curriculum where the information regarding third gender should also be included.

Guidance and Counseling: Each and every school should have facilities regarding Guidance and counseling of teachers and students. Personal guidance and health guidance are important for the students so the Professional counselor should be hired to eliminate any kind of mental stress and trauma within school setting.

Zero tolerance for Gender inequality: School should open for everyone; third gender students should also be welcomed into common schooling. Every School should prepare a code of conduct/ do & don't for maintaining discipline in the campus. Code of conduct should have sections dealing with zero tolerance policy for third Gender. There must be provisions of Penalties and punishment on violation of rules.

Gender neutral language: In schools teaching, non-teaching and other professionals should not use derogatory remarks on any gender especially third gender such as - (Kinnar, chakka, hijadwa sala etc) which humiliates their dignity. A separate gender sensitization committee should be set up to resolve those matters.

Raising Consciousness: Out of 17 (SDGs) Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 5 focuses on 'Gender Equality' as it is mentioned in Global platform so every country is following its guidelines and working in this field at grassroots level. Every School should involve all stakeholders including Parents, Teachers, Administration and society to raise consciousness through Awareness campaign/ Community Development Programme. The country India should also give more emphasis on it and must include in the curriculum.

March 1 is observed as Zero Discrimination Day. On this day we celebrate the right of everyone to live a full and productive life—and live it with dignity. International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female is observed on 6th February globally. Similarly an international day of zero tolerance of gender discrimination should also be made.

Conclusion

In the concluding lines it is said that the participation of all kind of people is necessary and needed in the education system. Education is the solely powerful weapon for achieving social justice and equality. The goal of present education system should establish inclusive and equitable society where every citizen dream big, feel safe and protected, and also participate in nation building. The current education system must benefit India's children in such a way that no child feel deprived, excluded and loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of their birth or background. This Paper ensures that filling the social gaps in accessibility, affordability, participation, and learning outcomes in school education will continue to be one of the major goals of all education sector development programmes. Indian education system and policies run by government have made enormous progress towards bridging gender and social category gaps in all levels of school education for instance a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' will be constituted to enhance the nation's capacity to provide equal quality education for all girls and transgender students (National Education Policy 2020). Government should introduce policy regarding elimination of any remaining disparity and discrimination in access to education (including vocational, professional education) for children from any gender or other marginalized and socio-economically disadvantaged group. In schools textbook and teachers these two are the essential source of imparting knowledge.

And during school days students have strong belief on their textbook and school teachers if textbooks are written without gender bias or including third gender issues in it and teachers impart those contents intelligently, clearly and patiently then it develops a sense of respect, holistic view of society, gender diversity within them. Today, discussion of third gender and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) should be constituted in the classroom. This is the part of the new guidelines which is aimed at inclusivity and a more equal appreciation of different relationships: friendships, workplace relationships, or marriage. The intention is to help grown and young people to understand Gender difference, sexual orientation in all its forms and to develop sense of respect for themselves and others, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, it is said that the 'Equity precedes Equality'. In addition, School is the place where we enjoy all rights equally. The curriculum should be constructed on the basis of Gender lens or feminist standpoint. Recently, the first transgender toilet is built in Varanasi, near Kamachha area by the Uttar Pradesh government under the Smart City project to ensure the participation of the community in the cleanliness of the city. This was a long-awaited demand as they have faced a lot of obstacles. The reason behind it to promote all kinds of inclusivity, but the large disparities still remain the same which needs to be identified as early as possible and resolved near future.

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