

WOMEN IN CHANGING WORLD

— ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

— Edited by —

AMIT BHOWMICK
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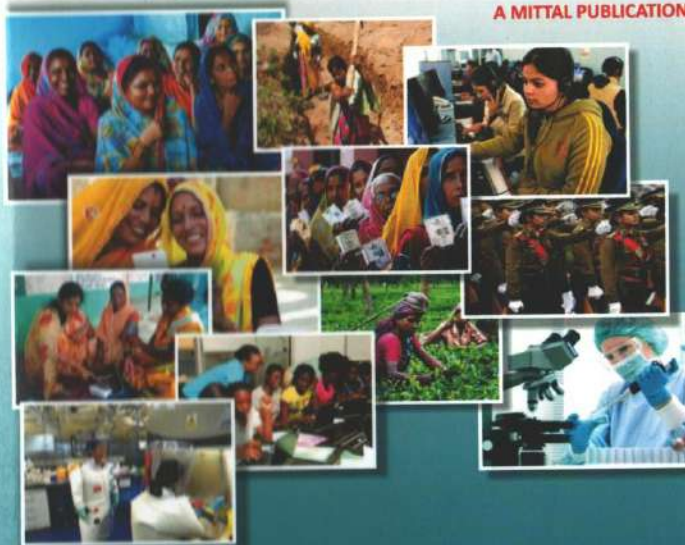
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A MITTAL PUBLICATION



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GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY OF SUBJECTS, CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

J.MARIA PREMA

Introduction

When education is seen as a social reformer that brings about change and tests the present realities, it becomes the most powerful process of eradicating gender inequality. Education can help to create such new values and forms by which both men and women can utilize their human faculties fully. Education that empowers functions for equality and gender issues, which is aimed at presenting those images of that which is not yet. This chapter will deal with how gender was focused in each subject.

History: History has all along been dominated by men, especially the powerful ones, while women have been mechanically mentioned as having obtained power on some occasions (as Razia Sultan, Noor Jahan and Rani Lakshmi Bai). Keeping women out of the purview of this discussion is chiefly caused by the fact that the focus of disciplinary knowledge has always been concentrated on power, and narrow attention is paid to the sequence of incidents that caused a change in these power systems from time to time, and that only public life has been taken in focus while describing history. Feminist historians argue that as labour is divided on gender basis; public/private dichotomy and

the related values are linked in a hierarchy of values, which push women out of the historical description; so it becomes necessary that the structure of history is made to go through the process of paradigm shift; it should be beyond from the history of production to social reproduction; and history of family production, labour force and cultural resources should be written. Until it happens, women will not be able to get a place in history, nor will they be mentioned in it, and until such time, justice will not occur with their lives and wholesome experiences.

Economics: In economics too, the above kind of power issues and public/private dichotomy are reinforced. Its mainstream is kept free from the domestic and familial social assumptions. Thus, the service done by a large section of women who provide non-salaried work and production remains invisible. Besides, if a woman is engaged in domestic production or voluntary community work, it also remains invisible.

It is very important to undertake analysis of economics of gender and it is important to see how gender difference leads to different economic outcomes, whether it pertains to income, earning, and poverty rate, working hours or other norms of ensuring economic solidarity by economists.

Sociology: The mainstream of sociology explains the shortcomings of migrates synthesis of gender issues, and thus, it reminds us that despite the social status of women being linked by feminist scholars, yet several of their theoretical issues have remained untouched. In substantive sociology, chiefly such structures as caste, class, tribe, family, culture; and such processes as modernization, westernization, culturisation, urbanization, industrialization and globalization are emphasized. In all these, the presence of women cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the problem is not that women are completely absent. In fact, sociology is accepted as a soft option, and so, it is considered more appropriate for girl students.

Of course, neither in structure, nor in processes is seen as gendered entities. Therefore, they entail different meanings for men and women, so there is a tendency to overlook it. For example, in the NCERT book, a chapter has been included on population and demography, yet it has not mentioned anything on adverse female sex ratio. Sex ratio has been included in a chapter on the sex ratios of deprived groups as a sub-section of women. This type of treatment does not result from non-understanding of gender, but

rather wrong-understanding. Showing gender inclinations means that an additional subject or chapter is introduced about women, or their visibility should be augmented, or the women issues should be explained as social problems.

Consequently, in sociology (together with history and political science), more focus is given to women's status, and no attention is paid to the structures that create gender relations, in which an ideal Indian Society is constructed by an ideal institution, as is conceived by joint family and other systems, and which are considered inherent like the judiciary. This type of tendency indicates necessity of Indian Women. This type of tendency is an obstacle in the path of meaningful genderisation in social sciences, and due to it, no change occurs in male-centred paradigms of different subjects.

Political Science: In the subject of political science too, attention has been focused to power with a mechanical paternalistic viewpoint and so gender has been included as a chapter on women empowerment in the curriculum. Under the 72nd or 73rd amendment, it has been included as a discussion on women reservation. Of course, the main subject and theory remain centred round the paternalistic political theories, and sometimes you can see a footnote that carries feminist criticism of these theories.

The mainstream subject remains focused on narrow politics, as party politics and party system, election and election alliances of different groups in Indian Society etc. There is need to broaden the definition of 'political' and it needs to be broadened and extended in the field in which the study related to women is essentially linked. At first, there is need to understand that politics has no such impact on women as it has on men, so there is need for exploring an internal effect about it.

Secondly, in addition to this, political processes often transform the gender relations, which should be explored. Thirdly, women take part in political activities like a political subject, as different from men, due to which questions are raised on specificity of women's political activism, as : should they be classified that analysed as a different entity? When such questions are raised, the study of political science can be understood in a perspective different from traditional scope.

Geography: Among all social sciences, geography has been too fortified to restructure gender analysis and knowledge, that is, it has not incorporated any gender issues. Possibly, it is due to the fact that women form only a miniscule of academic geography scholars despite the fact that they form nearly half of the world's population, especially in India. According to Rose (1995), geography is a subject that gives forth a dualistic thought and great theories as a paternalistic subject, which claims to speak on behalf of all people; but in fact, it tells only about the white, the bourgeoisie and men.

On the other hand, feminist critics argue that gender is not only incidental for geography, it has also been playing a main role in creating spatial scales and environment, where social life is visible. If we look from a male attitude, we find that space by itself is free from gender; it is an open path which can lead to any place. We are aware that some spaces or places create obstacles for women and in fact, they become a cause of fright or violence against women, especially when it comes to women going outside at night. Does the cultural perspective display an equal presence of men and women? Are all places comfortable and secure for both men and women? Do we, as teachers of geography, create an atmosphere in the class that is equal and harmonious to all students? These are the questions that the critics of geography try to answer.

Sciences: As different from social sciences, purpose sciences like mathematics claim objectivity as their shroud, and being away from gender and other social inequalities, as they tend to include gender and other social inequalities under subjective notions. Scientific methods begin from objectivity and end on the process of formulating a theory or law. The theory or law, thus formulated in a scientific manner, is considered logical, value-based and neutral. Critics opine that modern science, with its published objectivity, is incapable of removing prejudiced attitude towards women, also at the same time, it firms up such tendencies. In the ancient period, organized knowledge (or science) considered women as a unique creature different from men. Science reasons that women are incomplete men; therefore they are inferior to men. Science of chronology claims that owing to their lighter mind, women are inferior to men in intelligence. This fact is overlooked that the brain of a woman will be in the ratio of her body; it also explains that all scientific processes are not free from prejudice.

Besides, the language used in scientific circles strengthens paternalistic image; this concept takes root in the social environment. At present too, this type of gendered language is being used, of course in a less aggressive manner as it once used to be. Objective sciences (mathematics, physics) are considered hard sciences and masculine significance is attached with them, while the subjective branches of knowledge (as sociology, psychology) are considered soft sciences, and they are considered more relevant to women. The stereotypes thus produced are activated of themselves, and so, some women opt for mathematics and physics as against opting for other subjects.

The first point of criticism against objectivity of science is that the knowledge created through scientific processes is not value-less, neutral and general as it is claimed to be. In fact, feminists think that scientific knowledge is a social structure, and as it is created in cultural, political, social and economic values, it is also created here. They emphasise the fact that, the claim over scientific objectivity covers the relations of knowledge and power. This type of objectivity is structured dichotomy which creates a parallel reality of gender, in which subjectively rules more importantly than objectively; logical feelings are more important than cultural and natural feelings. You can see that these terms are either logical or privileged. The first adjective is used in comparison with unscientific, illogical and feminist. Thus, the gender forms rendered to social realities make the world look replace with prejudiced and deformed dichotomy, where any degradation of masculine norms is considered outrageous.

Women have been able to have only a limited access to science and technology and have been aloof from almost all intellectual, scientific and technological communities. They have always been connected with upbringing, child-rearing and housekeeping. The fields in which they have excelled are in their capacities as homemakers, nurturers and midwives; and these activities have never been considered part of science and technology; and their contribution to science and technology has remained hidden from history as it has seldom been recorded. (Mackenzie, 1985)

The tendency to accept science and technology as domains of men pervades in the minds of students too. Studies reveal that when students are asked to relate a story of mankind they might have heard, they made pictures only of men and boys. To study how students look at science and technology and how they think

about these, a study was undertaken at the Bhabha Centre for Science Education, in which boys and girls made the picture of a male scientist who was young and working alone in a chemistry laboratory. While describing scientists, they used words like 'he' and 'she'.

This opinion is connected with technology too; what women do is non-technological, while historically, their existence is deeply linked with survival technologies. Thus, a cause is behind it how we define technology. There are a number of socio-cultural factors which keep women aloof from such fields which are directly termed technological. Gender stereotyping of jobs is universal. As a result of such ever-pervading stereotyping, women do not contrary to the field of their career choice. This fact leads to fewer women going for science and technology as their career. Women form only a miniscule 9% of total scientist in India.

Mathematics: Mathematics is also assumed to be an ideal, logical and methodical concept which is placed at the top of school curriculum; in its concept, the central focus is given to a logical, free, autonomous and substantial individual as part of the modern nation state. This type of structure has been formed on this understanding that mathematics is the highest zenith of human logic, while mathematics appears to be free from values and which tells the universal truth. However, it is in fact based on male values and assumptions. This view is further fortified with the lack of description of women mathematicians in this male-dominated domain of knowledge. Also, the scheme for syllabus lacks any social references; the questions that are normally asked in exercises are seldom related to women's lives. In a study related with the mathematics textbook, it was found that not ever once any question was contained about women's dress in the problem sums, while it included several questions about purchase of clothes and garments. (AWAG, 1988) The researches have been conducted on classrooms also reveal that girls are systematically discouraged and devalued, they are told that they would not be able to do well or attain mastery in mathematics, despite the fact that they were doing well in mathematics continuously.

It is important to understand that mathematical capability is seen in the context of social situations and activities; while school mathematics is seldom related to the daily and social life of children. Mathematics, as taught in our schools, seldom such questions or problems which could need multiple approaches

with open ends and which lack a singular and final answer. An important assumption in school mathematics is that mathematical claims (or answers) always need external evidences (that is, teacher, textbook and guidebook). This viewpoint works contrary to students, especially for girls, because women normally lack these external evidences.

Language: Language travels through all subjects, and it possesses a basic place in construction of knowledge, and has extensive and far-reaching implication for gender relations. It works as a carrier of those thoughts and assumptions which are considered natural and which are strengthened by day-to-day interaction. Thus, it grows so orthodox that we lose its significance. Sexism enters language, and distinguishes only the gender (for example, the method of ending words influence the orthodox methods), and generally, it uses the term 'man' to signify entire humanity. In traditional naming, women are identified by their father's or husband's name. The titles like Ms or Mrs denote the marital state of a female, while such a title in man's name does not denote any such thing. Therefore, there is need to sensitize children regarding how language operates, how it imposes concepts and how it establishes the power differences in a natural manner.

It is also said that language not only reveals the presently existent things, but also tells about those which are extent and shapes out attitudes about them. Therefore, when language is used in a different way, the situations and circumstances can also undergo a change. So, students should be taught that language is very important not only for maintaining political connection, but also changing out attitudes which later go on to change the world's circumstances. When the word 'black' replaced the word 'negro', or 'differently-abled' replaced the word 'disabled or handicapped', 'sex-worker' replaced the word 'prostitute', they became widely acceptable socially; they also indicate that we are acquainted with the history of repression, exploitation, isolation and moral degradation, and also possessed of the willpower to change such a system.

The above description clearly indicates that when questions are raised against the androcentric assumptions are interwoven with scientific theories and behaviors and feminist ideas were reproduced according to feminist thinking, rewriting started to occur in the field of woman history.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

A just and powerful curriculum, from the viewpoint of gender, should be so capable that it can challenge the established gender identities of acquired knowledge in a logical manner. In the whole world as well as in our country, women movements and women's studies have enriched our knowledge and they have revealed how the project of possibility can be completed by education.

If developmental assumption of education is accepted, it is created by the known structures and experiences; in such a situation, the curriculum will have to be constructed such that girls are able to understand the surrounding environment before they are set out to understand the other references and how to tackle them.

In this context, the important points will be related to their work, body, sexuality, marriage, guardianship, family, caste, community, state, modernity, economy, violence, opposite sex and hierarchy. These points will extend from language to social sciences to sciences, and they will not be imposed on students like the excess of knowledge, rather they will emphasize the fact that these points should be presented such that they can be linked to subjects being taught at every level in the school. Further, they can be linked with higher thinking and more complexity. This will help to further strengthen criticality and will not lead to mere accumulation of facts.

Pedagogy

The interaction between teacher and student in the classroom is very important because it has the capacity to define whose knowledge will become school-related knowledge and whose voice will shape it. Students are not merely small students for whom the grown-ups have to present different types of solutions. They are also the observers and critics of their circumstances and needs. Therefore, they should be included in the debates and problem-solving processes related with their education and future opportunities. Therefore, students should be acquainted with the fact that their experiences and perceptions are important, and thus, attention with the fact paid on developing their mental faculties for thinking and independent reasoning. What children learn outside the school: their capabilities, learning capabilities and basis of knowledge: they bring all this to school, and all this advances their learning process. This is more important so far

as the deprived children, especially girls, are concerned because the world in which they live and confront the hard realities they are seldom discussed. A teacher can make use of the following pedagogical techniques in order to cultivate gender sensibility in students:

If children's social experiences are brought into the classroom, their issues of struggle or conflict should also be addressed. Struggle is an inevitable component of a child's life. They have to confront such situations continuously where they needed to undertake moral evaluation and act accordingly. These circumstances can be multifarious, whether they pertain to their own struggle with the family, community or violent incidences taking place in the social world. Still, in official curricula, knowledge is introduced in a neutral manner, and struggle is made aloof, so that a definite viewpoint of the society can be legitimized. This viewpoint of the society is related with the dominant concepts.

Most feminist teachers think that knowledge is not neutral and both teachers and students bring their texts into the classroom, which shapes the transaction in the classroom. Feminist educationists lay emphasis on participatory teaching-learning under which objectivity, emotions and experiences have a definite and vital place. Participation is a powerful method, yet if it is made a ritual, its sharpness is lost. If participation is made the ground for an effort to realize some predetermined goals where teacher's own ideas dominate those of the class, then they are no more meaningful. The experiences of students and teachers should be appreciated, and it would be a judicious beginning.

Play is an inseparable part of childhood. Its expression depends much on this fact who is playing where and with whom. In the succeeding lines, we shall make an effort to outline how play takes shape by gender in the science campus. It is based on the observation of primary children studying in municipal school where play is seen in the context of a process of development. Children and teachers look at school as a place of learning-working or as a place for playing. In fact, a good student is the one who does not play. Despite this unwritten assumption, children start to play during the break, or when they are not being watched by adults; at these times, they play freely. Here by play we mean the fun games that are played without any formal games.

While making all efforts for actual cooperation or participation, it is essential that all possible differences should be identified

and worked upon, because when children express their own or collective experiences, they also connect and relate them with others' experiences too, which may not from part of social reality. So, it is necessary to know that such a difference is not owing to situation but difference. The pedagogy which provides children an opportunity to express themselves freely in the classroom, and that is not imposed with certain predetermined decisions or stereotypes, helps to advance children in a better manner for instruction in the higher classes.

Questioning Knowledge: Reading against the Grain

It is necessary and possible too that students are enabled to read against the grain, that is, they should be able to raise questions against the acquired knowledge, whether its source is biased textbook or other literary material in the environment. Doubtlessly, it is an aim of higher secondary education. Still, there is need to cultivate such viewpoints which can enable students to raise questions against the components of the environment; and encourage them to compare and contemplate. A women teacher often questions her culture through folksongs, discusses them and also analyses them, it is chiefly oral form. As the treasure of knowledge is manifested in different media, it can be in any form, like television, advertisement, songs and films etc. A student should keep making dynamic interaction with them all. This type of parallel learning processes stress to form new equations between teacher and student.

A gender-sensitive teaching process not only affirms individual and collective experiences but also establishes them with the larger structures of power. The questions like who is allowed to speak for and when, and whose knowledge is most valued indicate the relation of a teacher with students. An B.L.Ed teacher informed about the course thus: "The paper on gender and schooling made me aware of these realities that I might not change everything, but I would certainly make an attempt in my class and make an effort to bring about a change." It signifies that different techniques should be constructed for pupil-teachers. For example, it may be important for some children to speak out in the class, and so they should be encouraged, while others may like to learn by listening.

It is the duty of a teacher to interact with students and at the same time, provide them a secure environment in which children

can express themselves freely. With making learning of the learner effective and augmenting his comprehension, it is also necessary to keep in mind that the difference existing among students should also be expressed, and the modus operandi of the expression should also be observed (such as the differences between boys and girls). The secure environment of the class provides children an opportunity for expression. This environment gives them chances for conflict, sharing of experiences and exploring creative questions and it is the way that work can be started on new resolutions. It should be a place where students can practice democratic methods to interact with one another and learn the ways how to tackle the conflicts they come across outside the school. A school should be a place for students, especially girls where they can discuss decision-making, raise questions on the basis of their decisions and choose viable options.

When women learners are made passive in participatory teaching-learning circumstances, it goes against the interest of the school. In our schools where the gender-based structures are used to maintain a strict division to maintain discipline between boys and girls; if a girl ever tries to mix up with boys, she is taken as a violator of the gender code and she is pulled back. Clearly, there is need to rethink the situation of a learner in the class. The thinking thus undertaken will be redefined, and there is need to incorporate a space for this redefinition in the teacher training programme.

Recommendations

- **Access of All Girls to Education:** The government should be pressurized to increase the educational outlay. Free and quality education should be ensure for all, and girls' access to school should be ensured all over the country.
- **Quality and Retention Capacity in Girls Education:** Government schools have been becoming educational centres of poor education for deprived sections of the society, especially girls, which has resulted into increased drop-out rates for girls. Therefore, infrastructure and teaching quality should be improved in government schools.
- **Nationwide Consultation on Schools of Religious Denomination:** There should be a nationwide

women's studies centres and those educationists and workers who have experience of working on gender issues. The NCERT and SCERT should sponsor such programmes in which there are research inputs conducted on women's studies; also, such materials should be constructed in which there is critical and proactive attitude, and it should be incorporated at all levels of textbooks, as well as at primary, middle and secondary levels. Educationists and researchers of women's studies should be invited to shape the syllabi and other related subjects' content.

- **Integrating Input of Trained Experts on Adolescence and Sexuality:** The NCERT and SCERT should get material readied with the help of gender-sensitive psychologists and advisors and prepare the plan for curricular processes and methods of teaching which can initiate healthy and open discussion on adolescence and sexuality between boys and girls. Adolescence is an important step in development of life of an individual. Sexuality is the centre of an individual's personality, self-esteem and self-confidence. In such a case, it becomes important that children are explained the difference between sexuality and gender; they should be made to experience to be free from hesitation and shyness, so that they become capable of taking informed decisions which can protect them from harms and dangers and also give them confidence to raise their voice about right and wrong.
- **Assigning Importance to production of Household Articles, Labour and Human and Cultural Resources in Social Sciences:** There is need to highlight and underline the production of labor, household articles and human and cultural resources. When there occurs a paradigm shift in social sciences, it would not remain only a record of social products, but that of household production, production of labour, as production of human and cultural resources too. It would only then be able to represent women in social sciences in an adequate manner, so that justice can be done with their work, life and experiences holistically.

- **Incorporating Gender Dimensions of Diversity, Sexuality, Violence and Conflict:** In school curriculum, all those issues of diversity, sexuality, violence and conflict in which gender makes its presence felt should be incorporated.

Viewing Language Such That Difference between Powers Can be Eradicated: Language should be viewed across the curriculum and awareness should be built in the ways in which it neutralizes and perpetuates power differences.

Curriculum planners, textbook writers, teachers and students should all be able to:

- Understand those methods in which differences in language and powers can be neutralized. The language should be such that it does not display any prejudice towards any gender (man or Woman), that is, it should be neutral.
- Construct the language related to sexuality, physiology and body, especially that of girls, because the most cases pertain to them who fall ill quite often as they fail to coordinate between their physical needs and activities.
- Often women assume silence on certain issues or articles, or fail to express themselves for lack of language. It is vital to understand that it is not a mark of their natural or biological incapacity; rather it is a mark of culture and education in which girls are trained to remain passive and indifferent.
- It is compulsory to identify that women's life, body and existence are not displayed in literary language, and the similes and metaphors used in it. We can find absence of female subjectivity in traditional male-dominated literary discussions. Women's articles and language should be incorporated in the textbooks prominently.
- Recognize and understand that all these norms and absence are social construct, so they can be undone; therefore, there is need for feminist deconstruction and reconstruction.

- **Establishing Conflict as a Method of Teaching:** As violence is prevalent everywhere including in children's houses, schools and outside world, so the teaching classes should teach them how to tackle it and conflict should be established as a method of teaching. It is necessary so that children cultivate a real perspective about violence and also learn how to overcome it.
- **Assessment System Geared to Differential Aptitude:** A standardized singular assessment does not feel adequate to measure inter relational need and aptitude of children. Therefore, diverse assessment techniques and forms should be recommended which comprises oral as well as written, including objective, subjective, pictorial, artistic, abstract, concrete, artificial and symbolical forms. These different types of assessment should be used keeping the different groups having specific aptitude.

Conclusion

As has been said before, imparting education to women has been held logical on the ground that the educated women would be helpful in generation of supplementary income, it will also lead to lower child births and population control, they will be better mothers, and will be helpful in preserving traditions and spiritual values that are helpful in uniting the society. All these advantages look at women as a tool that will hold the family and society, and overlook their personality and several human rights. It is important paradox that the education, that regenerates social values and stereotypes and checks them, is also the tool to empower.

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