

3.2

POSITION PAPER

NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP

ON

GENDER ISSUES IN EDUCATION

*In my textbooks I learned that only men
are kings and soldiers.*

*Till I read a book in which famous,
queens ruled and fought against enemies.*

*In my textbooks I learned that only men
are doctors.*

*When I went to a doctor I saw that
she was a woman.*

*In my textbook I learned that only men
do farming in my country,*

*until, on a train journey I saw women
working in the fields.*

I have learned that I have a lot to learn by seeing.

– Pooja, Ramya, Anuj, Utkarsh
students of Class VII, Baroda

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**GENDER ISSUES IN
EDUCATION**



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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BACKGROUND

Gender is not a women's issue; it is a people's issue. "Femininity" does not exist in isolation from "Masculinity". The construction and power of one determines the construction and power of the other. Gender relations are neither "natural" nor given, they are constructed to make unequal relations seem "natural", and can be naturalised only under the duress of socialisation. Thus there is undue pressure on boys and girls to live up to the established "norms" of masculinity and femininity. While girls endure unwarranted social control, discrimination and domination, boys too suffer from the stereotyping that exists in a patriarchal culture. Discouraged from being emotional, gentle or fearful they are thrust into the role of breadwinners, protectors, and warriors. Thus – unequal gender relations stunt the freedom of *all* individuals to develop their human capacities to their fullest. Therefore it is in the interest of both men and women to liberate human beings from existing relations of gender.

The National Focus Group on **Gender Issues in Education** started work with genuine appreciation of the fact that, with the setting up of a specific focus group devoted entirely to this issue, gender had been accorded significance in the current curriculum review process. However, there was also discomfort and apprehension. Discomfort that the members of the group were all women. And apprehension that gender concerns could be excluded by other focus groups from their areas of concern to be relegated solely to this group, that once again gender could be marginalized as a "women's issue". Fortunately, beginnings do not always foretell the end of the story, specially not if it is a thought-provoking one, which is what we hope the story of gender issues in this curriculum review will turn out be.

In our view, gender cuts across all disciplines, is basic to the construction of knowledge and has pervasive and wide-ranging implications for human relations in general and education in particular. So we came ready to bear the characteristic "double burden" – this time of doing our work on the home ground of our own team, as well as of interacting constantly with the groups working on other aspects of society and culture, and on various disciplines. It has been hard work: from the nine page concept note on gender that we sent out to all the Focus Groups and the Steering Committee in the first month, through the specific recommendations relating to the concerns of each Focus Group that went out in the second, to the persistent discussions at an NCERT meeting in Delhi, and with chairpersons of Focus Groups and Steering Committee members at their meet in Hyderabad, as well as the sustained engagement with the drafting committee in the third month.

All this was done in addition to holding three consultations of our own that included sessions with local academics, activists and teachers, at the NCERT, Delhi, the Homi Bhaba Centre for Science Education in Mumbai, and the School of Women's Studies at Jadavpur University, Kolkata;

reaching out to scholars and activists across the country who have experience in issues of gender in a wide range of fields and disciplines, requesting their written inputs; and finally compiling a paper written by over 25 people, with verbal inputs from at least 30 more.

It has been hard work, but the responses have also given us cause for hope. Professor Krishna Kumar, the Director of the NCERT set the intellectual orientation of the entire review process in the direction of meaningful and substantive transformations; this created a ground conducive to our interventions. He not only lent full support to the efforts of this team, but also encouraged and facilitated the initiation of dialogues on issues of gender between members of this group and others. Chairpersons and members of many of the focus groups, as well as members of the steering and drafting committees too, engaged with us on various issues of gender relating to the aims of education, the construction of knowledge, identity, learning and pedagogy, curriculum, teacher education, language, mathematics, health, habitat, work and education, early childhood education, and the education of SC and ST children. We hope that, just as each of these concerns have found place in our thinking, so too gender will find place in the reflections and recommendations of specific focus groups as well as in the final policy recommendations.

The Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education comprised members from a wide range of backgrounds – from Vadodara to Kolkata and Sitapur to Mysore, from education activists, rural as well as urban, to scholars from the fields of Education, Mathematics, Science Education, Sociology, Literature and Women’s Studies, from schoolteachers to NCERT personnel. The range of representation augured for extremely rich discussions, but also some hard-hitting confrontations, the import of which cannot be adequately captured in the formal lines of a position paper, hence must find place here.

Sometimes, during our most exciting interchanges regarding contemporary challenges and possibilities, we would find a colleague, with experience of the workings of rural schools in Uttar Pradesh, sitting tense in the throes of a deep contradiction – the expression in her eyes signaled her intellectual involvement in the discussion, but her tight lipped silence sliced right through our impassioned exchanges. “What is the point of envisioning any of these possibilities, when I know that there is not even one classroom per class in the government schools I know in my area? How can you expect the teacher to teach, or a student to learn anything in such a context?” would be the grim question at the end of our discussion. Or, “Do you know that there are hundreds of TV sets gathering dust in educational institutes in Uttar Pradesh, because they have not even been connected?” Or a schoolteacher colleague would intervene, “Do you know how many girls in rural areas drop out of school because it is too far, or because the teaching is so poor in the free government schools that it is impossible to pass without getting private tuition? Most parents try to pay for their boys to attend the better private schools, and won’t fork out private tuition fees for girls even if they manage to spare enough for boys – after all boys are seen as the future

breadwinners, so must be educated. So where do the girls go? To the religious schools that circumscribe them further within repressive gendered mores.”

At times like this we realised that none of our recommendations, if implemented, could ensure even a basic secular education for the majority of girls in this country. There is absolutely no point in talking about transformation in textbooks and in the curriculum and pedagogy, if basic conditions for ensuring girls’ access, infrastructure and standard of education do not exist. The fragile hope that these three months of intense deliberations, as well as those of the decades preceding them, will bear any relevance to the education of the majority of girls in this country rests in the implementation of our first two recommendations at the end of this paper:

- (1) *Access to Education for All Girls:* The government must be impressed upon to spend more on education. Nothing short of *free and quality education for all* and the provision of *accessible schools* for girls in every area of the country, will ensure that all girls gain equal access to education.
- (2) *Retention and Quality of Girls’ Education:* Government schools are increasingly becoming centres of poor quality education for the marginalised sections of society, specially girls, which in turn is connected to the high dropout rates of girls. Hence the *infrastructure and quality of teaching in government schools must be brought up to the mark.*

Another important concern that also emerged in the context of institutional provisions was regarding the isolation of educational research and training institutes from the significant research done in Women’s Studies centers and schools in universities, as well as from the impressive scholarship on gender that is now at the forefront of almost every discipline of study in academia, internationally, and in India too. It is a matter of serious concern that virtually none of this research finds any place in disciplinary education in schools. Hence we emphasise the importance of the following, our seventh recommendation:

- (3) *Integrate Input of Women’s Studies Research in Textbooks, Syllabi and Training:* The NCERT, as well as the SCERTs in each state, should develop formal linkages with centres and schools of women’s studies in universities, as well as with individual scholars and activists who have experience of working on gender issues in different disciplines. Joint programmes, funded by the NCERT and SCERTs, should be set up with a view to deriving inputs from research done in women’s studies, and to *jointly preparing material, informed by a critical and pro-active approach to gender, for textbooks at the primary, middle and secondary levels. Women’s Studies academics and researchers should also be invited to shape the formation of syllabi and content of different disciplines, as well as of teacher training programmes.*

Of this impressive body of women’s studies scholars and activists, both from women’s studies centers, as well as those engaged in research on gender in different disciplines, many have demonstrated their unstinting solidarity by contributing to the work on gender issues for this curriculum review process. We cannot thank them, for they are committed to the work of transformation towards a more just and equal world as much as we are. We can only place on

record their contribution and celebrate this solidarity. No less than ten scholars actually contributed to this paper in writing. Their names are included in the list of contributors at the beginning of this paper; however, in keeping with the collective spirit of this work, their specific inputs have not been acknowledged in the relevant sections. Professor Vina Mazumdar, pioneer educationist and scholar of the women's studies movement in India, who has continued to inspire, urge and sustain us with her intellectual leadership for more than three decades now, Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, founder Director of one of the first and most active Women's Studies Schools in the country, and Malini Ghosh, untiring feminist activist, all took time out of their busy schedules to give us valuable comments on the final draft of the paper. Professor Shefali Moitra, Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and Professor Arvind Kumar, Director, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai, made it possible to hold consultations of the Focus Group at their centers. Shri Homkar, Principal, Bhinar Ashram Shala, Bhinar, hosted us during our visit to the Bhinar school. The following scholars, activists and researchers participated in our consultations: in Delhi, Anita Rampal, Vimala Ramachandran, Uma Chakravarty, Gouri Choudhury, Usha Nayar, Swati Awasthi, Ishani Sen, Bharati Roy Chowdhury and Prabhat; in Mumbai, Chayanika Shah, Sonal Shukla, Nandita Gandhi, Razia Patel, Lalita Prabhakaran, H. C. Pradhan, Arvind Kumar, Swati Mehrotra and Ritesh Khunyakari; and in Kolkata, Sudeshna Sinha, Rita Gomes, Mina Das, Chilka Ghosh, Shefali Moitra, Samantak Das, Nilanjana Gupta, Malini Sur, Satya Gopal Dey, Janaki Nair, Nandita Ray, Sushmita Ghosh and Sonalika Ghosh. In Delhi, Disha Nanwani, Kashyu Gulati, Poonam Batra, Indu Agnihotri, C. Suvasini, Shirley Joseph, Sapana Arora and D.Bhavana contributed to the section on teacher training, and Prasanna provided valuable support in typing and feeding in corrections. The sincere and generous contributions of all these people, as much as the concerted efforts of the members of this group, reflects our joint expectations of a dynamic and pro-active approach to gender in education policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender is the most pervasive form of inequality, as it operates across all classes, castes and communities. Yet, while gender equality has been a key objective of education policy in India for over three decades, it has *lacked critical edge in implementation*. In real terms, the dropout rates of girls, specially from the marginalised sections of society and the rural areas continues to be grim—9 out of every 10 girls ever enrolled in school do not complete schooling, and only 1 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reaches Class XII in rural areas. Factors cited for dropout include poor teaching, non-comprehension, difficulties of coping and high costs of private tuition or education. Despite the education system's focused efforts to include girls, it continues to "push out" those who are already within. Clearly issues of curriculum and pedagogy require equal and critical attention, in addition to enrolment.

Work on gender sensitisation and awareness building has acquired a certain complacency, given that it circles around issues of enrolment, the relative absence of females figures or removal of gendered stereotypes in textbooks. Such work has proved to be inadequate and as some have argued just skimming the surface of a problem rather than addressing these concerns with greater depth. In order to move forward *serious inquiry into curricula, content, the gendered construction of knowledge, as well as a more critical and pro-active approach to issues of gender is necessary*. *Gender has to be recognised as a cross-cutting issue and a critical marker of transformation; it must become an important organising principle of the national and state curricular framework as well as every aspect of the actual curricula.*

In the first section, **Contexts and Concerns**, this paper observes that *schooling actually reinforces the gendered inequality of socialisation and social control; in fact schools themselves create boundaries that limit possibilities*. Traditional meanings regarding masculine and the feminine persist and continue to be reaffirmed. It points out how girls are not simply a homogenous category; by virtue of their sex, they are also differently impacted by heterogenous contexts of class, caste, religion, as well as the rural urban divide.

In addition, there are other forces and trends, such as those of globalisation and the privatization of schooling, the declining standards of government schools, communalisation of education, and the impact of public and domestic violence, that pose major challenges in relation to gender issues in education. A review of policies and existing realities reveals that these challenges are clearly not being addressed. Hence *it is imperative for us to assess the limitations of the ways in which gender concerns have been addressed in education, particularly in the very construction of knowledge itself*. The first section concludes with highlighting the circumscribed manner in which current approaches to gender, equality and empowerment of girls, as well as the silence on issues of masculinity, has impacted textbooks and curricula reform.

The second section of the paper, *A Project of Possibility*, argues that for progressive gendered policy to be implemented successfully, *a dynamic shift in approach is required*. Notions of “Gender” and “Masculinity”, as well as “Equality” and “Empowerment” have to be understood from a critical perspective. **It is necessary to move from seeing gender as mere *difference* to analysing gender as *domination***. Masculinity too needs to be analysed, specially to understand and transform the ways in which boys and men also suffer from the confining roles that a patriarchal culture determines for them, as well as in terms of the masculinist reinforcement of aggression and domination.

This section asserts that a commitment to equality involves developing in the learner the ability to question relations of power in society, as well as enabling her/him to overcome the disadvantages of discrimination and unequal socialisation. *Empowerment* should be viewed as a process that enables girls to challenge relations of power, and to assert their rights as independent human beings. However, as the “capabilities approach”¹ emphasises, *rights and choices in themselves cannot be exercised until central human capabilities are fulfilled* through material and institutional arrangements.

Education is an integral part of these arrangements that govern children’s lives. Thus in order to achieve substantive and equal citizenship, special curricular and pedagogic strategies have to be developed to empower children, specially girls, to overcome disadvantages *and develop their capabilities to exercise their rights and choices*. The aim is to achieve a *substantive equality of outcome*, not merely a formal equality of treatment. In fact, we may even require inequality of treatment, i.e. special treatment for the socially disadvantaged learners, to enable them to achieve equality of outcome.

The ultimate aim of a progressive gendered project of education is to propel the learner from individual to collective transformation, towards achieving *substantive citizenship*. Thus the objective is to enable girls to *graduate from individual empowerment to becoming autonomous and equal citizens who play an active role in transforming the collective life of a democracy*; so while developing the individual capabilities of girls to claim their rights, education should also foster in the young a deepened understanding of, commitment to, and capability to uphold the constitutional values of justice, equality, citizenship and freedom at the collective level.

Knowledge, as it has been shaped in every discipline, and through language itself, normalises, and establishes as “natural”, the inequalities of gender. The critical challenge is of deconstructing such paradigms, and of redressing the iniquities in the very construction of knowledge. Contemporary scholarship in virtually every discipline is now marked by significant research on gender issues. This has had deep implications for what is seen as knowledge, and how learning is viewed. School education should be updated in keeping with such research, and incorporate the

¹ Nussbaum M., 2000.

critically gendered dimensions of knowledge in each discipline to transform the ways in which all subjects are approached and taught in schools.

Commitment to a critical reassessment of the hierarchical constructions of knowledge would logically translate into more analytical, participatory and pro-active pedagogical strategies in the classroom. Learner centered, experiential knowledge and reading against the grain become critical aspects of this approach, as do *curricular and pedagogic practices*, that equally reflect the life worlds of both girls and women, make visible the invisible, and carry within them the seeds of a just social transformation.

Such a pedagogical approach would be greatly enhanced by a teachers' needs too being viewed in relation to those of learners'. Critical reassessment of their own socialisation would be an integral part of developing their own abilities as teachers if they are to be sensitive to the life-worlds of learners coming from diverse contexts. Innovative pedagogies have to be grounded not just in learning new games, songs and activities but developing in the teacher a conceptual and lived understanding of all that experiential knowledge and learning has to offer. In the final run it is not in monitoring teachers, but in enhancing training, and encouraging them to contribute to the shaping of critical, imaginative and innovative curricular and pedagogic process, that the real hope for transformation lies.

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

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1. CONTEXTS AND CONCERNS

India is reputed to have a progressive education policy with regard to the focus on gender. The National Policy on Education, 1986 put specific emphasis on women's education. It states that: *Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Educational system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women.* Besides the NPE, 1986, India is also a signatory to several international treaties that reinforce this commitment, such as The Dakar Framework for Action 2000, and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2000, the Programme of Action 1992, CEDAW 1993, The Beijing declaration 1995, and the World Conference on Education for All.

However, despite over three decades of commitment to gender equality and the universalisation of education, the ground realities are still grim, specially in the context of girls from marginalised groups and rural areas.

1.1 The Issue of Retention

While the overall enrolment of girls has increased, the dropout rate of girls from marginalised and rural sections, specially from the upper primary level upwards is extremely high.¹ A sizeable proportion of out of school dropouts, chiefly migrant, poor and working

children, are girls - school discontinuation rates of rural girls are twice as high as that of boys.²

National-level surveys and data also show that:

- 9 out of every 10 girls ever enrolled in school could not complete schooling.³
- Only 1 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reaches Class XII in rural areas and 14 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reach Class XII in urban areas.⁴

Thus, the likelihood of an urban girl continuing in school is low, and of a rural girl reaching Class XII very unlikely. In real terms then, what matters is not just access or enrolment but retention. While the cost of education is a reason for poorer children not enrolling or dropping out of school, studies show that school factors are also responsible. One of the major reasons why children, both boys and girls, in both rural and urban areas drop out is lack of interest in studies;⁵ hostile environments, poor teaching, non-comprehension and difficulties of coping.

- 26 per cent of children in one study cited school and teaching curricula related factors such as unfriendly atmosphere in schools, doubts about the usefulness of schooling and inability to cope with studies as reasons for their dropping out. Among girls in rural areas, these factors accounted for over 75 per cent of the dropouts.⁶

¹ Drop out rates for 1998-99 at the all India level:

for the primary level - boys 38.2% and girls 41.3% (pp. 142*)

for Classes I-VIII - boys 54.4% and girls 60% (pp. 178*)

for Classes I-X - boys 65.4% and girls 70.2% (pp. 178)

cited in the National Development Report 2001, of the Planning Commission of India from the *Annual Report 1999-2000, Department of Education, MHRD pp. 179.

² Sudarsban, 1998

³ NSSO, 1995-96, cited in GOI, 2002

⁴ NSSO Report 1997

⁵ NSS, 52nd round, 1995-96, NFHS II, 1998-99, GOI, 2002, IIPS 2000

⁶ NSSO 1995-96, in GOI 2002, pp.63-4

- The PROBE study found that of all the drop outs 47 per cent of the boys and 66 per cent of girls were withdrawn from schools by parents who cited factors such as schooling being too expensive, requirement of children in other activities and poor teaching standards as the main reasons for their decision.⁷

Thus data increasingly shows that the school system is betraying the poor. Schools, specially in rural and poor areas, are not places where children learn. The high dropout rate is now recognised in the education sector, as is the fact that a majority of children go through 5 years of education without learning even basic reading and writing skills. A large number of such schools have been identified by parents categorically as sites where learning does not happen. The increase in the curricular burden creates further ground for stress and the need to turn for help outside the school.

In such a context private tuition becomes necessary for children even to pass, specially in the case of first-generation learners who have no help at home. High costs of tuition add to the cost of school education, yet, hard put as they are, parents continue to retain boys in school in view of the fact that they are perceived as the income generators of the future. Financial support for coaching classes is out of question for most girls. Domestic responsibilities and the widespread perception of girls merely as future homemakers contribute to the problem and girls get short shrift when the costs of education magnify. They are withdrawn from school. Coaching classes are clearly not the remedy.

Therefore, despite all the efforts of the education system to include girls, the system is “pushing out”

those who are within, making it clear that issues of curriculum and pedagogy require critical attention in addition to enrolment.

1.2 Education as a Means of Socialisation and Social Control

Further, there is no simple co-relation between higher levels of education and the empowerment of women. We are aware that the declining sex-ratio is an outcome of a multiplicity of socio-economic factors that converge to impact the survival of the girl child. Yet it is a matter of concern that states with the high literacy rates for women record a declining sex-ratio: Delhi – 75 per cent female literacy, sex ratio 821; Punjab – 63.5 per cent female literacy, sex ratio 874.⁸ These statistics are symptomatic of higher rates of sex-selective abortion and hence greater violence against women. This is the paradox of Indian education, belying the expectation that increased access to education would improve women’s status. Has education failed Indian women? Again, we see that curricula and content become critical areas of inquiry and concern, making it imperative for us to assess the ways in which we have been addressing issues of gender in these areas of education, and in the very construction of knowledge itself.

Schooling reinforces the gendered inequality of socialisation across all divides. It is evident that the schooling of girls remains embedded in the societal context even though it provides an expanded space for growth to women. In fact, school curriculum and schooling become active instruments of cultural reproduction and social control without seeking to alter the informal and the formal processes of socialisation.

⁷ PROBE, 1999

⁸ Provisional Population Totals, Census of India 2001, Series 1. Statement 15 pp. 37

Formal education or schooling involves moving into public spaces, interaction with males (in co-educational schools and with men teachers); or being socialised (through the curriculum) as boys. However, the main concern to control sexuality in the direction of motherhood remains. For example, small girls are given some freedom and may be sent to primary schools (even

the co-educational ones) but the nearer they are to puberty, the restrictions imposed on them.⁹ Therefore, why girls drop out at 11 plus and greater are 14 plus from school may be understood in this context.¹⁰

The social control of female sexuality accounts for whether girls have access to education or not. This ideology also determines the quality, type and duration

Girls and Mathematics: Kaushal's Story

This is the story of Kaushal, who loves numbers. So good is she at counting that her old grandmother, with whom she lives, always asks her to do the daily accounts. Kaushal is 10. Her parents and her younger brother live in a nearby city, where her father is a mill-worker. Her grandmother works in the rich people's 'bungalas' during the day, and helps with her studies every evening. Kaushal is proud of her grandmother, for she can read and write, and only a few women in her *basti* can do that: those who went to school for a few years before getting married and moving away from their parents' homes have forgotten how to. Kaushal wonders about that: how can things that sit in your brain disappear? Mathematics is Kaushal's favourite subject. She likes it even better than craft, which is easy and which the teacher always helps the girls out with. She loves to come to the blackboard and solve sums in front of the whole class. The boys who sit in front - the teacher calls them the worst troublemakers - don't bother her too much, and the girls who do well in exams are not as good as her in doing sums. During other periods, Kaushal sits in her place at the back of the class and draws. She hates the noise in the class room, and thinks that the teacher should throw all the boys out. Most of them are bad at doing sums anyway. The teacher always says that the girls are zero in mathematics, that they are only interested in talking and playing. Kaushal hates this - after all, she is always getting the sums correct, right there in front of everybody! But what she hates even more is that the girls also say this, they are so scared of themselves. Her parents tell her that doing so many sums will make her brain weak for housework: will you teach your mother-in-law mathematics? they laugh. Some of her friends are already engaged to boys from their villages, and are going to leave school next year. Kaushal knows that her grandmother won't let that happen to her, at least not till she finishes school. After that, who knows? There are some jobs where they need girls who love numbers.

From: Manjrekar, 2001

⁹ Ahmad, 1985

¹⁰ According to Dube, girls begin to understand the special value accorded to brothers very early in life. (1987:167). Bennett in her study of Nepali Hindu women also mentioned that all the older women reported that only boys had been allowed to go to school when they were young (Bennett, 1983:166).

of education they receive and what they do with it later i.e. whether they work or not and what kind of jobs they take up; whether they work to earn before or after marriage. Further, the curriculum is not designed to question the basic premises of the value system surrounding female sexuality. If anything, there is a correspondence between the ideology of control of female sexuality, the socialisation of girls and boys, and education that reiterates and consolidates this ideology and socialisation.¹¹

The values, norms, social practices, customs and rituals that underlie the connection between gender socialisation and formal process of education at school need to be understood. Woodsmall mentions that the same social custom that makes women teachers a necessity also prevents women getting necessary training to become teachers (1936:161). It also restricts the choice of subjects and curriculum.¹² Moreover, there is a hierarchy of tasks wherein domestic chores occupy the lowest place. The hierarchy of male and female tasks within the domestic realm correspond with those associated with the pure/high castes and polluting/low castes. For instance, women perform the polluting/inferior tasks associated with the caste system and this sexual division of labour reaffirms their low valuation due to the impurity inherent in them during menstruation and childbirth. Thus, daughters and women, may or

must sweep floors and wash clothes and dishes, but sons and men must not.¹³ Thus, from infancy girls are socialised to help, to be submissive and to learn the centrality of their domestic realm.¹⁴

Implications for girls as students: Once girls are given access to schools, the assumption is that as girls and women have entered the public sphere, empowerment will follow implicitly. Their life options will expand and they will be in a position to take greater control of their lives. But the complexity lies in the fact *that schools themselves create boundaries that limit possibilities*. The content, language, images in texts, the curricula, and the perceptions of teachers and facilitators have the power to strengthen the hold of patriarchy. The school becomes an enclosed space, like the domestic sphere where discriminations and violations are not talked about or questioned.

Socialisation and education reinforce each other. Schooling becomes another form of domestication. For example, school textbooks depict this gender based domestic division of labour. In the classroom too, just as dalit children are expected to perform the menial tasks, girls are often relegated the work of cleaning and sweeping, reinforcing the gendered division of labour.

The aspirations of young girls are unrelated to their actual intellectual and cognitive abilities.¹⁵ Cutting across

¹¹ Chanana, 2001

¹² The stranglehold of *parda* during the colonial period was recognised by Christian missionaries and by the Indian social reformers. A common strategy adopted by the Christian missions was the system of *zenana* education. Under this scheme, mission teachers went to the homes of girls to teach and also conducted examinations at home. In addition, vehicles transporting girls to schools were enclosed with curtains and public spaces in the school and college premises were blocked from view (Minault 1981:87-88).

¹³ However, when these domestic skills are linked to the market they become male skills e.g. tailors, cooks/chefs.

¹⁴ As in other societies, it is at this advanced stage of early childhood that the cultural expectations of boys and girls begin to diverge radically... Late childhood also marks the beginning of an Indian girl's deliberate training in how to be a good woman, and hence the conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles. She learns that the "virtues" of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in various household tasks' (Kakar, 1979:37). Also, Chanana, 1990.

¹⁵ This is evident when the results of school finishing or Board examinations are announced. Year after year, the performance or success rate of girls has been better than that of boys.

elite private schools to Government schools, girls perform better than boys but by the time they reach the end of middle school or secondary school their educational and occupational aspirations differ markedly from that of the boys.

The work of gender sensitisation and awareness building has acquired a certain complacency, and is limited to the issues of enrolment of girls, and to the relative absence of females figures or proliferation of gendered stereotypes in text books. Such work is clearly inadequate and there is an urgent need now for *serious inquiry into curricula, content, and the gendered construction of knowledge, as well as a more critical and pro-active approach to issues of gender.*

1.3 Heterogeneous Gendered Realities and Domains and Challenges in Education

Girls are not a homogeneous category, yet nowhere do they enjoy a status which is equal to that of men. In their case, the dimensions of rurality, class, caste and tribe, religion, and disabilities are further complicated by contemporary political and socio-economic forces to create cumulative disadvantages. As a result of this, girls have to bear multiple burdens of inequality.

a. Rural girls' education, accessibility of schools, and integration in the domestic economy: Rural residence has emerged as a very acute handicap. This is a result of the government policies due to which schools and educational facilities have been far fewer in the villages than in the urban areas. Thus, rural-urban differences have also been found to be significant in accessing the resources and the facilities provided by the state. For example, children in rural areas have less access to schooling because the schools are either not available or physically and/or socially inaccessible. Coupled with that is the

integration of the children, especially girls, in the village and household economy. Therefore, rurality has also been recognised as a critical indicator of who can participate in education. Moreover, the urban poor living in the slums of the metros and the children of migrant labour are another vulnerable category which have been adversely affected by the lack of sensitivity of government policies to their existential condition.

We need to envisage a process of education that teaches the young to question such socialisation. It is imperative that we design creative interventions at the level of textbooks, curriculum and pedagogy, that moves towards a critique of all forms of social control.

b. SC/ST girls' schooling, gendered labour and socialisation: Special educational benefits have undoubtedly facilitated the educational progress of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, particularly in the last two decades. However, they continue to lag behind educationally and there is great unevenness between different state and regions¹⁶. Poor SC/ST parents are unable to send their children to 'free' schools because of costs other than the tuition fee and of forgone income from the children's work.¹⁷ However, educationally the most vulnerable are girls. Dalit girls' educational aspirations are decisively shaped by labour requirements of the domestic and public economies: In the caste/gendered segmentation of the labour market women are disproportionately found in agricultural/rural labour, traditional domestic, low skilled, low status, or caste related (sweeping – scavenging) services in rural sectors. In urban sectors, poor women are located in lowly

¹⁶ National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe 2005.

¹⁷ Tilak, 1996

unskilled, low status feminised service sectors in urban informal economy. Educational careers of most dalit girls are shaped by this structure.¹⁸ Even those who can meet the expenditure of the education of their children, spend less on the schooling of their daughters than the sons.¹⁹ The expenses of dowry compound the problem, and the chances of girls being educated is reduced further.

While forces of class, caste, region combine to the disadvantage of girls, progressive political movements have in the past succeeded to some extent in enabling dalit girls to overcome these disadvantages and gain greater access to education. Yet, political movements can have only a limited impact as long as the intersectionality of caste and class continue to perpetuate the exploitative nature of gendered caste labour. As has been pointed out in the context of Maharashtra, that while the dalit women's movement has revived the progressive gendered concerns of Ambedkar's ideology and brought about a marked improvement in dalit girls' education, yet factors of socialisation, impoverishment, and the caste and gendered nature of the labour continue to impose limits on this change: Many dalit families of Marathwada and Vidarbha region defied costs and poverty to send their daughters to school. ... However, in the final analysis, multiple macro and micro factors viz. the dominant realities of material poverty, familial ideologies and cultures of femininity and female behavior and the caste gendered nature of labour market continue to set limits on dalit girls' educational levels.²⁰

Being Dalit and Female

Mangal is fifteen years old. She lives in a large dalit basti in Baroda. Her father works as a daily labourer and her



mother does domestic work. Mangal went to a local government school up to the third standard, after which she was taken out to look after her younger brother and sister. She has forgotten how to write, but can read a bit of Gujarati.

She worked as a helper in an English pre-school near her home. She loved her job, because she was able to teach little children. And she learned some English as well. The people in the basti taunted Mangal because she resisted cooking and doing household work; they said she thinks too much of herself because she works in a school.

Mangal's marriage had been fixed up when we first met her. She says she does not want to do housework all her life. Just because she was taken out of school, she says, doesn't mean she cannot become somebody.

Months later, we meet Mangal again. She now lives with her husband and his family in a small village near Baroda. She is pregnant, and looks tired. There's a lot of work to do on the land. She misses her work in the school. 'But I will do something in the village later', she tells us, dreams returning to her eyes. Girls have to go to school, she says, so that they can become somebody without fighting as much she has had to.

¹⁸ Unpublished paper by Padma Velaskar on 'Gender, Caste, Class and Education', 2005

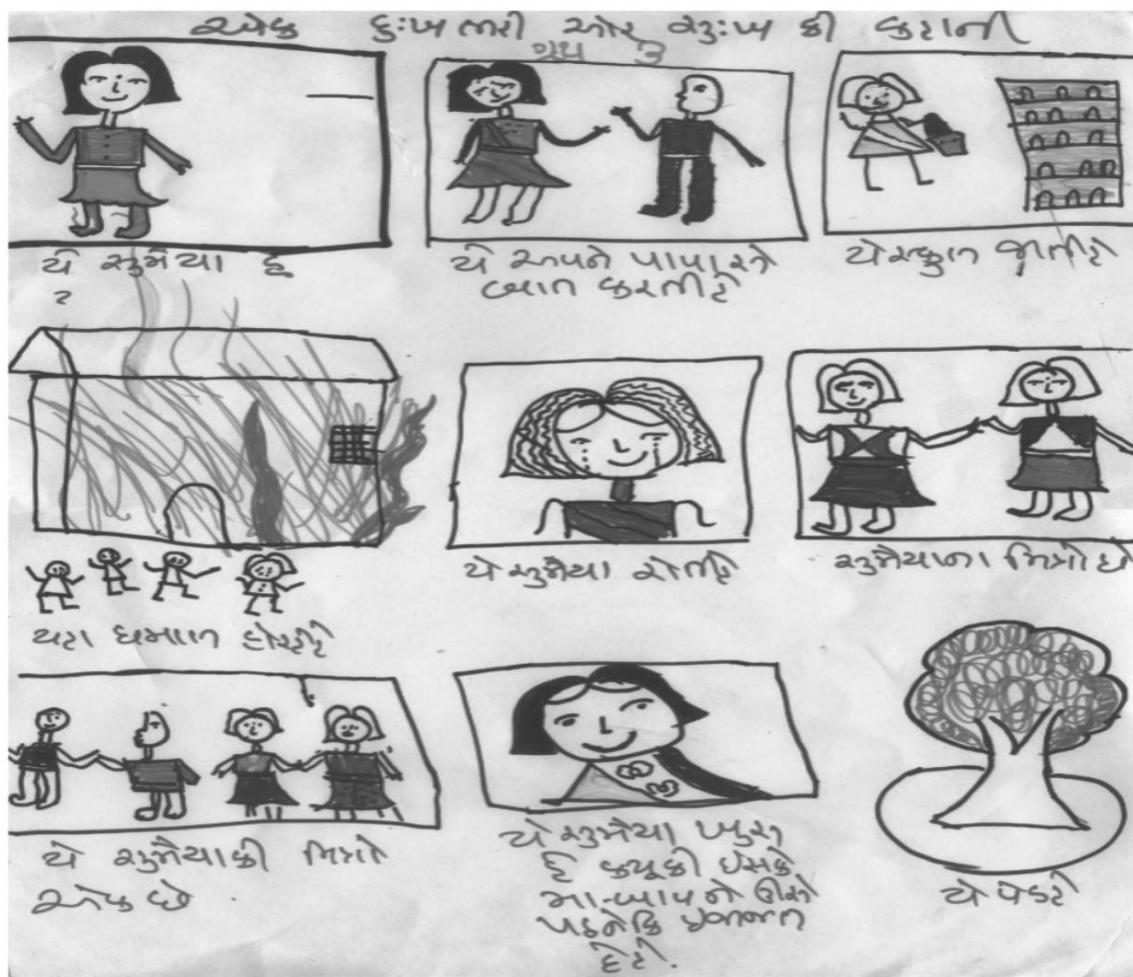
¹⁹ Tilak, 1996; Chanana, 1996

²⁰ Excerpt from unpublished paper by Padma Velaskar on 'Gender, Caste, Class and Education', 2005

c. Muslim girls' education: financial constraints and communal factors:

In the context of Muslim girls too, recent research has revealed *that contrary to prevalent stereotypes about forces of conservatism being the cause for low levels of education, financial constraints seem to outweigh parental opposition as women's chief obstacle to continuing studies.* In the north zone, financial constraints are much more important for Muslims than they are for Hindus, underlining once again the poverty of Muslim households in this part of the country, and this provides the most powerful explanation for the poor levels of Muslim women's education in the north.²¹

The south is an exception in that women belonging to lower economic classes have as good a prospect of continuing in school as girls from higher classes. This is because a higher levels of state investment in education, a larger percentage of female teachers, and good transport facilities that enable easy access to schools, which is a critical determining factor for both girls and female teachers: Even though Kerala is not a prosperous state...[it] is spending 6.3 per cent of its gross domestic product on education. Uttar Pradesh's ratio is around 3.7 per cent. Over 60 per cent of teachers in Kerala and over 40 per cent



²¹ Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, pp.57

primary school teachers in the south zone are women, in contrast to 18 per cent in Uttar Pradesh.... Furthermore, road transport is reliable and readily available in Kerala enabling female teachers to travel long distances to teach in rural schools.²²

While regional factors, poverty and the role of the State in providing resources are critical, the impact of violent communal conflict as well as of the communalisation of education on muslim girls is significant, as will be discussed in a later section.

Ek Dukh Bhari aur Sukh Ki Kahani: Sumaiya's Story

This story was written and illustrated by students of a Muslim girls' school in Baroda in 2002. It tells the story of Sumaiya, whose father dies in the violence. Her house is burnt down. Her friends tell her that she must have courage and continue to study, and they promise to accompany her to school every day.

d. Implications of violence, conflict and displacement for gender and education:

Violence and violent conflict, both in the public and domestic realms, affect the mental health of individuals, often resulting in crippling levels of trauma and loss. Situations of violent conflict have had a serious impact on education in general and girls in particular. The 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat has seriously impacted the access to education opportunities of Muslim girls, both in the immediate and long-term context.²³ And in areas like the North-East and Kashmir, the education system has been severely affected by the impact of violence, conflict and displacement for over a decade now, but the problem has still not been addressed.

On the other hand, the increase in violent conflict in the public sphere, specially violent conflict premised on the sexual abuse of women, as witnessed in Gujarat, Kashmir and Manipur has resulted in intense pressures – specially of militancy and the demands of militant notions of masculinity for boys, and severe experiences or threats of sexual violence for girls.

The impact of domestic violence on children too is considerable, and affects their self-confidence and performance in school. Domestic violence is now recognised as pervasive, and recent surveys demonstrate that many children come from violent homes and confront violent situations from a very early age. Education has not focussed on equipping the young to reflect upon issues of violence and violent conflict, nor to deal with the resultant trauma.

Mental Health Consequences of Violence in the School and Domestic and Public Spheres :

Increase in public and domestic violence, as well as sexual harassment and abuse within educational institutions negatively impacts girls performance within schools and their ability to access education. It impacts female teachers as well as students. Though widespread, there is no data available on this. Besides sexual harassment, corporal punishment is common. Additionally, other discriminatory classroom practices based on prejudices related to identity are not uncommon. It is imperative to address all these forms of violence in the classroom and the school.

²² *Ibid*, pp.73

²³ See chapter entitled "Crackdown on Education" and its subsection entitled "Girls' Education And The Impact Of Widespread Sexual Abuse And Burning Of Women" (pp.27), in Kavita Panjabi et. al., *The Next Generation*.

e. Communalisation of education: While communal perspectives have been present in textbooks in earlier periods too, studies done of textbooks rewritten from this perspective, for example in Gujarat, highlight their ready potential to contribute to a culture of divisiveness between religious communities.²⁴ While boys are subject to acute pressures of militant masculinity, the roles of women and girls are further represented as circumscribed by the community and they are portrayed primarily as upholders of tradition and family values. The National Curriculum Framework (2000) undid a lot of the gains of NPE 1986. By locating religion as an important source of value generation in education it furthered the role of religion in defining ideals and norms for women and girls.

f. Schools of religious denomination and limitations to girls' education: Despite varying estimates regarding their numbers, it is a fact that schools of religious denomination, like the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan

(including the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs) and Madrasas, comprise a significant percentage of the non-government schools. Several analyses, including the views of the *National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, Recommendation and Report II of the NCERT*, 1999, and Teesta Setalvad's analysis, submitted to the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Culture in 2000, on the nature of textbooks used in the religious schools, highlight the ways in which such education delimits girls and women in extremely orthodox roles and functions that are detrimental to their development as autonomous citizens of a secular democracy.

While there are some statistics available on the Vidya Bharati schools,²⁵ those on madrasas are virtually impossible to come by. This is not by deliberate design, but symptomatic of the larger statistical purdah imposed by a rigid system which either reinforces a homogenous category of "gender" or "community" – in this case the Muslim community. Estimates from individual states, like West Bengal, provide some clue to the magnitude

²⁴ *The National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, Recommendation and Report II*, NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training), 1999; *Publications of Vidya Bharati (Section VI of the report)*, which clearly states that "Much of the material in these books is designed to promote blatantly communal and chauvinist ideas. ..." In its earlier report (January 1993), the Committee had commented on publications which had been brought out with similar objectives by the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and Markazi Maktaba Islami and had recommended that they should not be allowed to be used in schools. Cf. too Teesta Setalvad's analysis, which has been much cited, both by the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Culture in 2000, and by various newspapers across the country since March 2002 as well as "Instances of Communal Indoctrination in Examination Papers", *The Telegraph*, Wednesday 24th April and Monday 29th April, 2002; The "psychological fear created in children, that could result in carnage and destruction." *The Telegraph*, Wednesday, 24th April, 2002. See also chapter entitled "Crackdown on Education" and its subsection entitled "Girls' Education And The Impact Of Widespread Sexual Abuse And Burning Of Women" (p.27), in Kavita Panjabi et. al., *The Next Generation*. "This team's investigations revealed that there has been a systematic crackdown on the education of minority children and youth at all levels, in both private and government schools, in Gujarat. This is a process that was initiated months prior to the carnage and peaked in the period starting February 28th. In addition to the more obvious economic, physical and psychological devastation that the largest minority community has been subject to, the denial of education to its children has been the surest way of crippling its chances of its recovery in the future." Also, more recently in *The Telegraph*, Jan 22, 2005: "A controversial decision to make primary students in 18,000 fill in a village-wise religion-based questionnaire has raised suspicions [about the use of primary school students to create a religion based databank in the rural areas]."

²⁵ In 1999, the total number of schools run by the The Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan [including the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs] was claimed to be 6,000 with 12,00,000 students and 40,000 teachers. (As reported in the *National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, Recommendation and Report II*, NCERT, 1999. *Publications of Vidya Bharati (Section VI of the report)*. Cited in *Communaism Combat*, October 1999.) Another source from 2002 cites that "in just five years from 1998, the number went up from 13,000 to 19,741, and that there were 24,00,000 students enrolled in these schools. (*Manufacturing Believers*", *The Hindu*, February 10th, 2002).

of the problem. The number of madrasas registered under the government Madrasa Board in West Bengal is over 500; however, it is estimated that a much higher number function in the state outside of the purview of the board, but there is no record of their numbers.

Currently the debate on religious schools is polarised and ironically exclusively focused on madrasa education. On one hand, West Bengal has adopted the strategy of 'secularising' madrasa education, and there are parallels here with the modernisation recommended by the NPE 1986. The madrasas registered under the government funded and regulated Madrasa Board offer a 'secular' education as per the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, with an additional paper on Islamic studies that may include some religious training. The argument here is that there should be increased funding for the Madrasa board, in order to bring more madrasas under the fold of a regulated 'secular' education, with a view to gradually integrating them in mainstream education.

On the other hand, gender sensitive educationists in states with no state governing board view the modernisation of madrasas as a mere ploy. They hold that under the guise of 'religious freedom' madrasas actually impart a religious education that interprets the freedom to practice religion and culture as the freedom to practice gender inequality. Their argument against the new trend towards 'modernisation of madrasas' is that this will tend to disempower muslim girls and deny them a chance of a secular education. This is specially reflective of the experience of states where unregulated madrasas proliferate in the absence of any governing body. The thrust should be on providing access to an integrated and

universal system of education for children of all denominations.

The West Bengal experiment is an exception; most states in the country do not even have a Madrasa Board. On the other hand there are no known measures being taken to address the proliferation of the Vidya Bharati schools. The point however is that the number of schools of religious denomination is on the rise, and in the absence of access to good schools, it is the poor and girls who form the majority in schools of religious denomination. As such the non-government religious schools are non-regulated and fix social identity within religious identity, thus restricting and limiting both knowledge and identity. In addition, there is a definite agenda in religious schools that both reinforces the subordination of girls and fixes their identity solely in terms of a religious identity, thus trapping girls within powerfully circumscribed religious ideologies of subordination. While a large percentage of the students in religious schools are girls, the range of problems and perspectives relating to gender and communalism in schools of religious denomination across the country remains largely neglected.

g. The challenges of globalisation: The issues of gender equality constantly take on new configurations specially in the context of the challenges brought on by changes in the economy in the last 15 years. These have significant implications for education.

- ***Proliferation of Private Schools and Decline in Standards of Government Schools:*** With globalisation, the high demand for education, and the changing nature of the of the states involvement in school education in the nineties, privatisation has been taking

place at a rapid pace in all sectors of education. On the one hand we have an unregulated private sector in education, where a majority of schools focus on market values and success rates, and do not have a commitment to the constitutional values of equality and citizenship or to the ideals of social justice and collective well-being. On the other hand, the government school system is responding adversely to privatisation. Studies show that government schools are becoming centres of poor quality education for the poor and marginalised, and are being attended by girls from poor families.²⁶ Polarisation of schooling is creating imbalances which are severely gendered, with parents deciding to send their sons to private schools, whatever their quality, in the hope that this education will afford some upward economic mobility.

Non-Formalisation of Education: There has been a growth of the non-formal sector and a downsizing of the formal sector in the government education system, without the problem of declining standards in the latter being redressed. Current government policy is moving towards non-formalising the formal stream. Efforts to deal with teacher absenteeism or skewed student-teacher ratio in remote areas, or to provide bridge courses for those outside the system have resulted in the scaling down of professional and infrastructural requirements of schools. In some states like Madhya Pradesh there has been a ban on appointment of fulltime teachers in primary and secondary education. In the non-formal sector too, poor infrastructure, and reliance on barely trained

para teachers with no service contracts results in impoverished standards of education. It is primarily dalit, tribal and minority communities that access non-formal education schemes (like the Education Guarantee Scheme) introduced by the government. Girls within these sections are particularly disadvantaged. While the non-formal system has indeed provided some form of access to those who would not have had it otherwise, this sector is growing with, the formal sector being downsized. And the problem of lack of learning within the mainstream system is not addressed. There is a need to address the ways in which government schools are being responding to privatisation, and strengthen them rather than put into place alternate systems which disadvantage poor girls.

Language as a new marker of Discrimination against Girls in the context of Employment:

Globalisation is marginalising girls further in education in relation to access to English medium education. With globalisation, the demands for fluency in English have increased in the job market. More boys are being sent to private English schools where possible, whereas girls continue to attend cheaper or free vernacular schools. In Mumbai, the ratio of boys to girls in English schools is approximately 3:1, whereas in Pune the ratio of boys to girls in Urdu schools is 1:4. It is clear that language has become a marker of discrimination against girls in the context of employment, and this new form of discrimination needs to be addressed seriously.

This dichotomy - boys: superior, private schooling; girls: inferior, government schooling -

²⁶ Ramachandran, 2004

has its own tragic consequences for the self-esteem and identity of girls. Girls clearly differentiate between the two, and have, with considerable anguish, accepted the divide which makes them less educationally deserving than their brothers. That English is the language of the public sphere of paid ‘prestigious’ employment and the vernacular is the language of the private sphere of domestic work or low-paying jobs is clearly understood by girls.

[Why don't you go to an English school?]
Girls can do housework, that's why. Boys will have to work.
(Seema, 9)
My brother will be a doctor.
[To be a doctor, do you have to go to an English school?]
Yes.
[And what about you...?]
No, I'll be a teacher. (Ritu, 10)²⁷

h. The importance of sexuality education²⁸:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Though it comprises an inevitable part of the experience of growing up, and a critical form of self expression, sexuality has been perceived as unhealthy, been equated with promiscuity, and, until recently, been shrouded in silence and denial, even in the field of education. Specially since the NCFSE 2000, sexuality is being addressed in education materials in ways that are

extremely problematic, for example in terms of an opposition between a disapproval of promiscuity, and the ‘highly valued ideals’ of ‘Samyam’ or self-control. (Section 2.6)

On the other hand the impetus to train adolescents in matters of reproductive and sexual health is limited by concerns related to population control and disease prevention. It is important to transform these parameters of sexuality education and neither perceive sexuality as a problem associated with promiscuity, shame, moralising, nor to delimit discussions of it to questions of population and disease. Sexuality has to be understood as:

- Extending beyond physical bodily sensations and as *critical to the constitution of self and identity* of both boys and girls, in terms of beliefs, attitudes, values and self-esteem
- An important *form of self-expression*
- *An integral aspect of the ways in which the power relations of gender, caste, class and religion are played out in society*

Adolescence

Adolescence is a specially critical and complex stage of life when young people learn to come to terms with their sexuality. The understanding of sexuality that develops at this stage becomes central to a person's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence. The silence that shrouds this issue affects girls even more than boys, is often a barrier to dealing with problems of adolescence, and results in the formation of unhealthy attitudes that are detrimental to the sense of self and confidence. *It is extremely*

²⁷ Manjrekar 1999

²⁸ Sexuality Education in the National Curriculum. Note prepared by Voices Against 377 for the NCF.

important to provide learners access to information about sexuality to make them aware of the diversity which exists in expressions of sexuality and gender; to make it possible for them to make informed choices that equip them to negotiate danger from those who seek to violate them; and to deal with the possibility or experience of sexual violence, both in the domestic as well as in the public sphere.

Schools should also create the space for frank and healthy discussions that enable all young people to come to terms with the role of sexuality in their lives, encourage them to experience freedom from shame, and help them to develop the confidence to express what they see as right or wrong.

i. Girls with disabilities – doubly discriminated:

Girls with disabilities are generally not on the radar screen either of those committed to the issues of education of the disabled or to education of the girls. Those committed to gender equity, by failing to consider disability, and those committed to disability equity by failing to consider gender, have unwittingly rendered disabled girls invisible.²⁹ This marginalisation of girls is evident in the disability legislation that does not address the problems of women and girls in any of its chapters.³⁰ In a culture where any deviation from normally accepted archetypes is seen as a marked deviation, the impaired body becomes a symbol of imperfection. The myth of the beautiful body defines the

impaired female body as unfeminine and unacceptable³¹. Being a daughter marked with a disability is considered a fate worse than death and thus leads to cognising the birth of such a daughter as punishment for past sins. Nevertheless, the number of girls with disabilities is substantial enough to underscore the double discrimination faced by them in terms of gender and disability and multiple discriminations if they also belong to the socially disadvantaged sections of society. Girls with disabilities are commonly stereotyped as sick, helpless, childlike, dependent, incompetent and asexual, thus greatly limiting their options and opportunities.

Concerns Specific to Education : Girls with disabilities form a heterogeneous group in terms of the type of disability and associated needs, the socio-economic background, whether they live in the urban or rural habitat and their caste, ethnicity etc. This heterogeneity has a number of implications for education. For example, girls with mobility disabilities may face physical access barriers to school while girls with visual and hearing impairments may face access barriers to curriculum. The prejudice surrounding their ability and value continues to perpetuate the view that educating them is futile. Opportunities for girls with disabilities to receive education or to attend training courses are available to only a few.³² They are generally segregated and excluded from society by the practice of sending them away to residential schools which are very few in

²⁹ H. Rousso, cited in Mohit A. 1977

³⁰ The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995

³¹ Ghai. A, 2002

³² I.Rao, 2004

number³³. This often masquerades as a response to their educational needs but is in fact often a response to a) the failure of so called mainstream schools to cater for all their local population and b) parent's difficulties in coping with looking after children with significant support needs and/or difficult behaviour in the context of inadequate and/or inappropriate support³⁴. The cultural bias against women, intertwined with economic factors, restrict the girls from poor families from gaining access to the limited resources that are available; hence they cannot participate in educational settings on an equal footing even with boys with disabilities. The need for assistive devices and transportation makes education of girls with disabilities a costly proposition, that ill-affording parents are willing to invest in even less than they may do for boys.

Discrimination against marginalised groups

Today the educational needs of ST, SC's and the minorities are recognised by the state. However, groups that are further removed from the mainstream have not been acknowledged equally. Disabled children, those suffering from HIV, and children of sex workers remain outside the concerns of the education sector. In addition, the levels of knowledge of disability, sexuality and safety imparted in schools is either abysmally low – or nil in the education sector.

1.4 Taking Stock

a. Review of policies

Early post-independence policies stipulated a curriculum that was thought to be 'relevant' for girls, based on the understanding that education had to address their 'special needs' as future wives and mothers in the modern nation. The related themes of relevance and differentiated curricula for girls and boys continued to dominate debates up to the 1960s.³⁵ The most radical departure from the view that girls 'needed' a different education came with the recommendations of the Hansa Mehta committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1964). The committee viewed differentiation as a perpetuation of existing traditions of unequal division of labour, and rejected differentiation on grounds of gender difference as 'unscientific'.³⁶

Nationalising Women's Education: The Education Commission Report (1964-66) marks a historic moment in policy discourse on women's education. However, while debunking gender differences as socially constructed and unscientific, it circumscribed their agency outside of motherhood to choice of 'careers', thereby limiting its concerns to the education of urban, middle-class women, who, in its vision, could be educated to contribute to national development. This view of education for women as instrumental to reproducing future citizens did not really resolve the issue of equality.

³³ For example, In India, despite the fact that there is a higher rate of blindness among females as compared to males (54% vs.46%), of the ten special schools available for blind students in New Delhi, only one is exclusively for girls and one other is co-ed, whereas the remaining eight are exclusively for boys.

³⁴ Morris J. 1998.

³⁵ The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) in GOI, 1959, pp.56.

³⁶ GOI, 1964, pp. 15

The National Curriculum Framework of 1975 stipulated the 10+2+3 system, wherein the first 10 years would comprise a common curriculum for all students. This resolved the debate on differentiation of curricula, at least at the policy level, and underlined the central argument of the Education Commission, that adopting science and technology education was essential for social and economic transformation. While doing so, however, it laid the basis for linking girls' and women's education to the instrumentalist vision of development of the modernising nation-state. This was in keeping with the explicitly instrumentalist approach to women's education evident in the 4th five year plan (1969-74) where the 'benefits' of women's education was linked to lower fertility and improving nutritional status of children.

The Women's Decade and Beyond: New articulations on justice and rights were made possible through the insights of national and global social and political movements in the 1970s. At the same time, there was growing international attention on the invisibility of women's labour in national economies. The declaration of the International Women's Year by the United Nations in 1975 saw the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) by the Ministry of Education.

Towards Equality: This report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), was a landmark document that substantively shifted the discourse on women's rights.³⁷ While bringing to focus the entrenched inequities on which women were located, it moved away from generalisations and stressed the different experiences of women from

different economic sections of society. It concluded that women's productive roles had hitherto remained unacknowledged in policies and consequently their needs had remained un-addressed. The committee pointed out that in the realm of social values and attitudes, formal education had failed to initiate change, and that if anything, education had served to deepen class differences between women since independence. The committee problematised the notion of relevance of knowledge for women. It sought to extend the definition of knowledge to the hitherto unexplored domain of local and specific needs of women. The committee pointed out that the premise that education should equip women for roles within the domestic sphere negated their substantive contributions within the productive sphere.

The *Shrama Shakti* report, or the report of the National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women of the Informal Sector³⁸ was the first committee which made visible the role and contribution of women in the unorganised sector of the economy. Education for this large section of women workers needed to address their 'contextualised' and 'diverse' needs. The Commission noted that to promote equality it will not only be necessary to provide for equal opportunities for all, but also its conditions of success. It recommended that syllabi need to be made more relevant for children of rural areas, by offering practical subjects like animal husbandry and cattle care as options along with subjects like history and science. It also recommended that textbooks be revised to bring women into greater focus.

Empowerment as Objective: The National Policy on Education, NPE (1986), has been hailed as a

³⁷*Towards Equality, 1975*

³⁸ *Shram Shakti report, 1988*

path-breaking document as it emphasised the re-orientation of the national education system to play a 'positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women...[and] the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators...[as] an act of faith and social engineering.'(para 4.2). Coming as it did in the wake of the women's movement, the vision of the NPE echoed the demand that education be 'used as an agent of basic change in the status of women'. Textbooks were revised at various levels following the NPE's recommendations. The NCERT also brought a series of teachers' handbooks to address gender equality in classrooms through curricular transactions.

Analysis of post-NPE textbooks shows however, that revisions were few, piece-meal and utterly cosmetic. Gender equity and equality sat uncomfortably with instrumentalist notions of education for girls and an unanalytical approach to educational –and particularly curricular – processes. The NPE Review Committee pointed out that although the NPE (1986) gave prominent space to education for gender equality, there was no reference to gender in the entire chapter on the 'content and process of school education', except for a mention that 'equality of the sexes' is to be one of the ten core curriculum areas.³⁹ Indeed, the NPERC recommended that a gender perspective be explicitly built into the entire curriculum, including the hidden curriculum.⁴⁰

Thus educational policies in India have not adequately addressed issues of gender and school knowledge, despite nearly all of them stating that textbook revision needed to be undertaken. Although we are critical of the attempts to revise textbooks within

the limited approach of making women's achievements visible, increasing their representations and removing overt bias in texts and visuals, we have to concede that since the 1970s in particular, there has been an important shift away from viewing education solely within the context of development to seeing it as an important area for interventions in enlarging debates on gender equality. However, policies do not provide much direction in terms of seeing how this is possible beyond quantitative indicators.

Another significant reason for the limited impact of policy on gender issues in education lies in the way in which the women's movement and Women's Studies have remained outside the debates within the education sector. Innovations and ground level work in the women's movement focused on health, violence, livelihood issues. Rarely were the educational needs of girls in mainstream schooling addressed by women activists. Women Studies too, was largely associated with the women's movement and did not engage with education departments in any systematic and sustained manner. This resulted in education drawing on the issues raised by this sector in a formal way with no practical integration of how this would alter existing practices and modes of functioning. Thus, ideas of empowerment led to the formation of specific programmes like the Mahila Samakhya Programme for adolescent girls and women but was not reflected in the central concerns of the education sector.

The National Curriculum Framework–2000 : The National Curriculum Framework for School Education(NCFSE) 2000, in its approach, tone and specific recommendations, has moved away from the possibility of education becoming a means of

³⁹ NPERC:1990, pp. 44

⁴⁰ NPERC, pp. 44-45

empowerment for girls and women. In addition to this, it also falls into the trap of seeing gender as synonymous with girls education and accords equally instrumentalist outcomes to their education. This is evident in the way in which the section on 'Education of Girls' appears under the broad heading of 'Education for Social Cohesion' (rather than, say, change or progress) in the framework document. The section begins with a large and abstract statement on gender equality and then quickly reduces itself to emphasising gender specific roles.

Equality among sexes is a fundamental right under the Constitution of India. Besides making education accessible to more and more girls especially rural girls, removing all gender-discrimination and gender-bias in school curriculum is absolutely necessary. Moreover it will be most appropriate thing to recognise and nurture the best features of each gender in the best Indian tradition.

After all, India gave her women the right to vote without any prolonged battle for it, unlike in the west. There is a need to develop and implement gender inclusive and gender sensitive curricular strategies to nurture a generation of girls and boys who are equally competent and are sensitive to one another, and grow up in a caring and sharing mode as equals and not as adversaries.⁴¹

Isolating gender from other concerns, it valorises religious tradition, thereby blinding itself to the oppressive role that tradition has played in circumscribing and controlling women's labour, sexuality, mobility and access to resources. Throughout the document there is palpable anxiety about the potential disruptions that awareness about social conflict and education could engender. The NCF, as a result, resonates with facile dichotomies between

western civilisation and Indian tradition. It makes references to the greatness of Indian tradition that accords women an exalted status and caricatures western women as 'demanding' women's rights, resulting in the breakdown of the family. It states "women in India need not protest for their rights because, as in the case of the right to note, they would be granted their legitimate dues in the natural course", by the ever generous patriarch. It acknowledges Rights purely at a rhetorical level, as change in society is seen negatively as a move away from tradition. "In contrast to the joint family and the extended family, the society is now witnessing the phenomenon of nuclear families, single parents, unmarried relationships and so on..." As Bhog notes, 'Even as the Indian state proclaims its progressive credentials by legislating against domestic violence and sex-selection technologies, it shuts the door on any critique of the family as an institution – something that the women's movement in India has been fighting for long to legitimise.⁴²

Within the boundaries of tradition, the NCF neatly accommodates the idea of equality within the pervasive instrumentalist view of education for girls and women, in which women are seen primarily as reproducers:

Equality of the opportunity [sic] of access to education is necessary if more women are to become the agents of change. Therefore, education of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family, and also empowering them to participate in decision-making. Investment, both in formal and non-formal education of young children in general, and of the girl child in particular is expected to yield exceptionally high social and developmental returns.⁴³

The population-development discourse has given further legitimacy to anti-gender equality politics.

⁴¹NCFSE, 2000

⁴²Bhog, D. 2002

⁴³NCF, pp. 20

Highly developed nations promote the view that overpopulation is the chief reason for underdevelopment and link funding for poorer nations with a mandate for population control, which is posited as a basic pre-requisite for development. While overpopulation does contribute to underdevelopment, the point is that such concerted focus on overpopulation not only detracts attention from equally critical issues of exploitative economic relations between highly developed and poorer nations that is the main cause of underdevelopment; it also legitimises state control over women's bodies, lives and choices.

These pressures have shaped education in India too – in textbooks, especially in civics, economics and related social sciences, overpopulation appears as the most significant factor contributing to India's underdevelopment. The influence of the population-development discourse is also evident in the emphasis on fertility control and the two-child norm as being central to the goal of “empowerment” of girls and women. Thus education policy caters not only to the forces of “traditionalism”, but also to the contemporary economies of modernity. It continues to reinforce instrumentalist roles for women as harnessed in the service of the nation, at the cost of a genuine empowerment that would focus on developing the abilities of girls to exercise their choices and claim their rights as autonomous citizens.

b. Existing approaches to gender, equality and empowerment

For three decades gender has been accepted as a category in the formulation of policy and curricula frameworks in India. “Gender”, “Equality” and “Empowerment” of girls have also been used as key words in educational documents for long as it is evident from the policy review section.

An important question to be raised is – what have been the limitations of our approach and efforts in formulating curricula policy, textbook rewriting and practices in the classroom.

“Gender” has primarily been viewed:

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

Gender is not just a womens issue.....
Its a peoples issue.

“Equality” as a goal, strategies adopted have focused on:

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

Parity has been the major objective, not just in terms of enrolment or retention of girls, but also in terms of the curriculum and content. Equality, in this *formal* approach, is seen as mere parity or identical treatment across gender. Parity is a concept that deals with boys and girls being offered equal access to school, equal facilities, and even equal representation in the curriculum and textbooks, but all in numerical and formal terms. Such identical treatment dictates that all practices be gender neutral and of “single standard” which is usually the dominant standard, based on male experiences and interests. As a result there is an additional burden on girls to achieve male standards,

when in fact the social reality and financial support available to them is not similar to that of boys. Disadvantaged by gender roles, responsibilities and resources, only very few and privileged girls are likely to achieve male standards.⁴⁴

Thus the distinction between parity, or *formal* equality, and substantive *equality* is critical. Substantive gender equality in education is a more complex notion that relates to the nature and quality of education, and has to focus on how education can enable girls to exercise their choice and claim their rights. The aim of education committed to gender equality cannot be merely to provide girls equal access to education, because ‘There is a world of difference between the equal right to education and the right to equal education’.⁴⁵

“**Empowerment**” of girls, another goal, has been perceived empowerment has been understood merely in instrumentalist ways as education for effective implementation of:

- better hygiene
- the two-child norm and population control
- informed “mothering” of future citizens of the nation
- upholding “tradition” and spiritual values, and improving social cohesion.
- supplementary income generation

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

c. Impact on textbooks and curricula

Textbooks: Reflecting the limits of existing approaches: The NCF 2000, without doubt, was a huge step backwards from the National Education Policy (1986). The latter saw education as, “an agent of basic change in the status of women”. “The National Education System”, it argued, “will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women.” But we need to assess the impact of its progressive policy rhetoric on textbooks. Did gender get portrayed in a manner that was significantly different from past representations of women and girls?⁴⁶

A thorough analysis of every subject taught at each level in schooling process both in the 80’s and 90’s did show glaring sexist bias in the textual content, the number of illustrative themes that favoured boys as being active and girls as merely passive roles, restricted mostly to domestic contexts.

Initiatives to remove sexist bias in textbooks undertaken in the last decade or so are played yet again by their limited understanding of gender and equality. One strategy was to attempt quantitative equality by increasing visual representation of girls and women. Another was to facilitate ‘role reversals’, in order to depict equality amongst the sexes. “If men can do it, so can women” - this mode was used to justify changes in content. As in showing or writing about men making tea, while women read the paper. Textbook writers made visible the achievements of women without any thought to how the very concept of writing accounts of great men’s lives needed rethinking. Therefore, women fought great battles like men. Children read equally masculine, militaristic accounts of women’s lives. Rani Durgavati, Razia Sultan found their place

⁴⁴ Cedaw: Restoring Rights To Women : “*The Foundational Framework of Cedaw*”, Ch. 3, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁵ Warnock.

⁴⁶ Bbq, D. 2002.

not just in history but in language textbooks. Though even here the same prowess was not accorded to them. Exceptional women like Rani Jhansi and Madame Curie were still defined by their domestic roles – textbook writers were careful to point out that that despite everything they continued to perform their domestic roles.⁴⁷

The picture is not very different at the state level. In a study of school texts in West Bengal, for example, it was seen that women were “generally portrayed as passive, dutiful and confined to the home. Like the peasants and manual labourers, women are shown as largely powerless. The curriculum and textbooks served to maintain the status quo in the larger socio-cultural context in the state.”⁴⁸

The picture that emerges is that despite valuable experiences and insights gained from the public literacy campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, explicit policy commitments, and considerable effort at producing materials that is empowering for girls and women, the problems persist. This is because traditional meanings of the masculine and the feminine continue to persist along with other oppositional, dichotomous categories of active-passive, emotional- rational, nature-culture and dependent-autonomous. There was no reconceptualisation of curriculum informed by an awareness of how gender is positioned within discourses of knowledge production and its relationship to social power essential in addressing these issues. Such a reconceptualisation would have necessitate attention to form, approach and content of the textbooks and curricular transaction, whether of the languages, the sciences, social sciences or mathematics.

The Hidden Curriculum - Beyond tokenism: A curriculum encompasses the essential and appropriate knowledge taught in schools. It involves the praxis of policy as well as the syllabi used in the teaching-learning process. Teaching and learning materials, classroom practices, evaluation and assessment procedures and language policy are all components of curriculum are ‘learned’ in school. It demands investigation of the contexts within which the children make meaning of, or responds to, these notions, through the filter of her/his subjective experience while growing up as female/male in society. While it is important to understand the ideologies underlying the presentation of gender in school textbooks, it is equally pertinent to examine how these ideologies are expressed at the level of everyday school practices and experiences, through what is often termed the ‘hidden’ curriculum.⁴⁹

What is the hidden curriculum of gender in schools?

Organisational arrangements (including the division of physical spaces within the classroom and the school along lines of gender).

Differential task assignment and sexual division of labour in school (boys allowed to go out of school, girls sweep and clean).

Routines, rituals and practices in everyday school life (like segregated seating separate lines for girls and boys, or having them form separate teams).

Systems of rewards and punishments, disciplining of boys and girls through different strategies, teacher’s labelling patterns, teacher-student and student-student interactions.

⁴⁷ Bbog, 2002.

⁴⁸ Scrase, T.J. 1993. *Image, Ideology and Inequality: Cultural Domination, Hegemony and Schooling in India*. New Delhi: Sage.

⁴⁹ Manjrekar, 1999.

Within the paradigm of “objectivity”, the school is largely organised on the assumption that “learning” is separate from the rest of children’s lives. The dominance of a textbook culture has meant that teachers begin teaching not with what the children know or have experienced but with what they do not know and have not experienced. It is not surprising for classroom knowledge to assume an independence from the child’s own experiences and knowledge of the world. This dichotomy often results in a tendency among children to compartmentalise their knowledge – that which has relevance in school and that, which is used and is relevant outside the school. As a result, the child is unable to relate to what is taught in the school and this is often reflected in rote learning and low learning achievements.

The Male Middle-Class Bias: Our thinking on curriculum needs to begin by acknowledging the ground reality: large numbers of children from lower class and caste groups are today accessing the formal educational system. The irony of the present moment though is that this changed constituency in the educational system is not factored into thinking about curriculum. Ever since the Kothari Commission report of 1966 emphasised the processes of nation-building and modernisation, the assumption of the male child as the prime mover of national development has tended to dominate both thinking in relation to the school curriculum, as well as its translation into the language and ideology of textbooks.⁵⁰

Further, there is another problem that has critically contributed to the male-centrism of

curriculum: Textbooks have presumed a sensibility and logic that meshes most easily with the knowledge-world of the urban middle class male child. The image of the child who can be disciplined to become the ideal citizen and a national asset dominates curriculum planning. It is the male middle class child again who comes closest to conforming to the hegemonic notions of ideal childhood, one in which the child is in school and not at work, is carefree, at play and sheltered from the sordid facts of adult life. Curriculum documents have therefore, addressed the upper caste urban middle class child (invariably male) and in turn are shaped by the norms of the world inhabited by this child. There is however, no match between the conditions of ideal childhood and the responsibilities and struggles of the large majority of the children found in government schools and in rural areas. Their life bears little resemblance to the life of the middle class child.

On the rare occasion when the child from the lower class is invoked, there is neither empathy nor affirmation of that identity. An excerpt from a lesson titled “The Indian Society and Children” from the Class VIII Civics textbook illustrates this point further:⁵¹

As you know, ours is a developing country. Most of the children are half-fed and half-clad. Their dwelling place stink with filth and odour. Poverty, malnutrition and lack of education is leading to increase in cases of child delinquency and juvenile crimes. What is child delinquency? It is a kind of misbehaviour on the part of the child which

⁵⁰ This aspect of the Kothari Commission report is elaborated up on by Krishna Kumar in “Agricultural Modernisation and Education: Contours of a Point of Departure” in S.Shukla and R.Kaul (Eds.), 1998.

⁵¹ Excerpted from Class VIII Civics textbook prepared by the NCERT titled; ‘Our Country Today: Problems and Challenges’ (1999: pp.34)

hampers his mental growth. He indulges in various kinds of anti-social activities. Instead of becoming an asset to his home or family, he becomes a burden to his family. A delinquent child is further prone to other vices like drug addiction, which further affects him physically and mentally. Child delinquency is not a feature of the Indian society alone. The Government of India is taking all possible measures to check child delinquency in this country. Special acts are passed for care, protection, maintenance and training of delinquent children ...

One of the questions at the end of the lesson is: What do you understand by the term "child delinquency"?

The tone of this lesson recasts what in a liberal reading might have been an acknowledgement of the socio-economic context into one in which the child is in fact implicated for *his* poverty. This child is then represented as the subject of supervision and correction by the state.

Textbooks have invariably been produced within metropolitan settings of privilege and power. The experiences of those who write textbooks are far removed from the lives of poor (urban and rural) children, whose questions, interests do not figure within the accepted hierarchy of knowledge. This is further aggravated by the fact that those who have contributed to the creation of knowledge regarding women have had little to do with the writing of textbooks. This might be, in the end, an extremely important reason why we have not, despite a decade-and-a-half of rhetoric, moved beyond the stage of pious policy pronouncements. Gender-sensitive material at the primary and secondary levels require inputs from those

who have struggled to bring women's voices, narratives, experiences and worldviews into the academic mainstream. Without this knowledge-base, those charged with rewriting texts will restrict themselves to superficial tinkering: either by increasing the number of times girls are visually or verbally represented in books or by facile role-reversals.

Viewing gender in isolation from other hierarchies and asymmetries within the social order results in such tokenistic revisions. Again, seeing gender as an 'add-on' in certain content areas and not others limits possibilities for engaging children with gender issues in any meaningful way. As R. Ramanujam insightfully points out, "Any discussion of gender at all is relegated to language lessons, and the percentage of time spent on this during 12 years of schooling is negligible."⁵²

2. TOWARDS A PROJECT OF POSSIBILITY

The Purpose of Education – Narrowing or Expanding Human Capacities?: Education can be viewed as a process of socialising learners into existing norms, values and power structures, of reinforcing traditional values. Or it can be understood to be a process of *expanding* human capacities to contribute to the making of a just and compassionate society. The former view, which is also the most retrograde one for issues of gender and social control of women and girls, advocates the inculcation of 'traditional values', and puts emphasis on school reforms that stress 'character development'. What character development translates into is a particular *narrowing* of human capacities to fit particular forms. The latter view refuses to accept as morally unquestionable all the established norms, values and regulations of a social order, or to take for granted as 'obvious' what are actually the ideological basis of a particular and historical

⁵² Ramanujam, R. "Gender Construction in Informal Curriculum."

form of social order. It holds those who seek to *narrow* human possibility morally accountable⁵³; it advocates the envisioning of a “project of possibility”⁵⁴ that *expands* the notion of what it is to be human.

Historically, modern theories of education—internationally and in India (except after 2000) – have given primacy to developing a critical approach, and honing the critical faculties of learners as an essential objective of education. This approach is the basic pre-requisite for enabling learners to envision a project of possibility, and to become capable of shaping the future in keeping with the ideals of freedom.

A project of possibility begins with a critique of current realities, *that a contradiction exists between the openness of human capacities that we encourage in a free society and the social forms that are provided and within which we must live our lives.*⁵⁵ It is this contradiction which is the starting point for a project of possibility and defines its broad aim as :

the transformation of the relation between human experiences and social forms. More particularly the project requires both the *expansion of forms to accommodate capacities* and the *expansion of capacities to make the realisation of new forms possible.*⁵⁶

The dynamics of rapid changes affecting all levels of society and its institutions also necessitate the forging of new social forms. Education that envisions a project of possibility engages constantly with these changes. Such educational practice is determined both by real and present conditions, and certain conditions yet to come, which it tries to bring into being. It works creatively towards expanding the capacities of learners to make them imaginative and capable of forging new

forms necessary for the creation of a just society. It also works actively towards expanding existing social forms to a point where they can create space for the capacities of those that have hitherto been marginalised or denied entry.

If progressive gendered policy has to be implemented successfully, and in real terms in education, then a dynamic shift in approach is required— notions of not just “Gender”, but “Masculinity” too, as well as “Equality”, “Empowerment” and women’s active participation in democracy as autonomous “Citizens” have to be understood from a critical perspective and in substantive ways. And since the enterprise of acquiring knowledge is at the core of the project of education, the central task is of elaborating a critique of the ways in which unequal gender relations both inform, and are reinforced, through constructions of knowledge; the greatest challenge is one of constructing alternative frameworks of knowledge that open up the possibility of creating a gender just society.

2.1 Critical Definitions of Gender and Masculinity, Equality, Empowerment

Critical aspects of Gender are that:

- It assigns *different* and *unequal* roles and attributes of “masculine” and “feminine” to men and women.
- In practice, it categorises these “masculine” and “feminine” roles and attributes as “natural” differences; this *makes unequal relations seem normal.*
- Gender is revealed to be a construction rather than a given if we shift the perspective from gender as

⁵³ Simon, pp.373

⁵⁴ Sartre

⁵⁵ Simon, p. 372

⁵⁶ Simon , pp.372-3

difference to gender as concretely experienced dominance: then gender changes *from what seems natural to what calls for questioning*.⁵⁷

- Gender relations are *not static*; they vary across cultures and time. They are dynamic and *recreate* new ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed and communicated in a particular context or period.
- Since gender is an evolving concept it is *open to re-examination and change*. Gender relations are *not*

sacrosanct; in fact existing gender relations *need to be questioned*.

Thus education becomes a critical tool for such re-examination. The crucial point is that viewing gender as concretely experienced domination enables one to analyse *abstract* discourses of equality for *actual* domination and marginalisation.

Masculinity⁵⁸

- Boys and men also suffer from the stereotyping that exists in a patriarchal culture. Boys are discouraged from being emotional, gentle and caring or from admitting to being weak or fearful. They are thrust into the role of breadwinners, protectors, warriors.

- Most men cannot live up to the notion of hegemonic masculinity. They are ridiculed for being effeminate if they are not aggressive. Gentle boys are pushed around and sexually exploited by stronger, macho men. An excessive emphasis on virility, male sexual prowess and performance leads to tremendous insecurities and anxiety in men.

- Men need to understand how masculinity is related to their risk-taking behaviours, specially in the context of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, alcoholism, and high-risk activities. Such activities endanger not only the men who engage in them but large numbers of others too, especially women.



⁵⁷ Mackinnon, pp. 243

⁵⁸ This section on masculinity is excerpted from Bhasin, pp.3

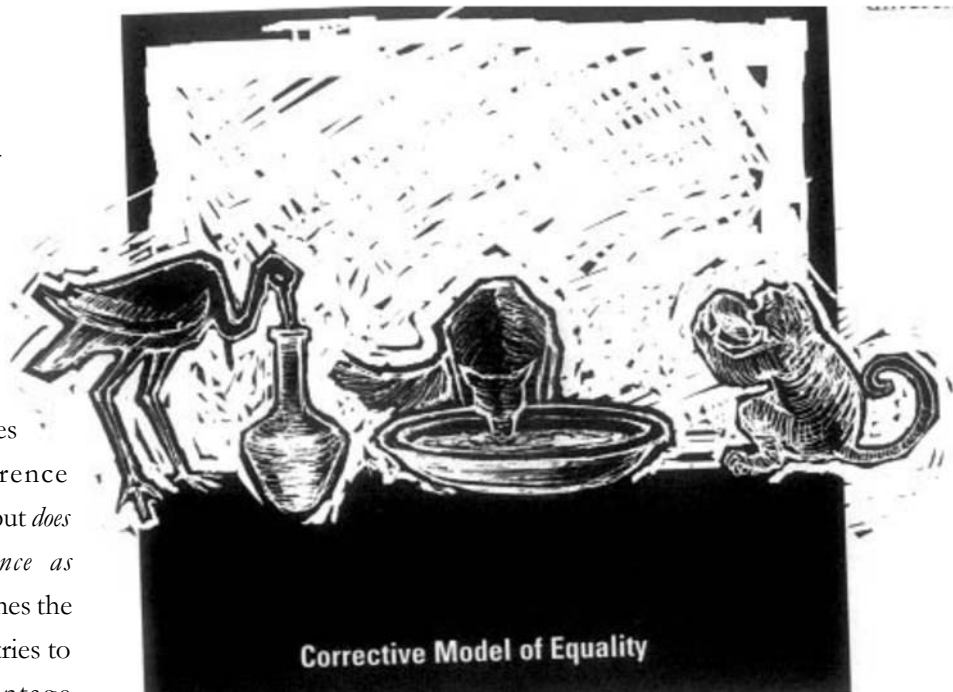
It is important therefore, to pay close attention to masculinity and what it can do to boys and men. A sensitive understanding of and discussion on these issues is long overdue.

Equality⁵⁹

- The *formal* approach to equality is inadequate; education must adopt the *substantive* or corrective approach to equality.
- This is not simply concerned with equality in *treatment*, but equality in terms of *outcome*.
- A substantive definition of equality takes into account and focuses on diversity, difference, disadvantage and discrimination.
- This approach *actively questions the ways in which gendering results in the subordination of girls*, and imposes *pressures of “masculinity” on boys*; it develops in the learner the ability to question relations of power that are central to the hierarchies of gender.
- This approach recognises the gendered difference between girls and boys, but *does not accept this difference as a given*; instead, it examines the assumptions behind it, tries to assess the disadvantage resulting from it, and develops a “different” treatment that **dismantles** that disadvantage.
- Girls are also circumscribed by a gendered socialisation that differs across caste, tribe and

community, and the rural-urban divide; this results in the creation of differentiated aspirations, capacities, and levels of confidence. This approach to equality *addresses such differences in ways that help learners to overcome disadvantages, value their differentiated capabilities, and develop them to the fullest*.

This means that processes of education have to be designed to ensure that girls, as well as boys, enjoy and relate to teaching methods, curricula and academic orientation that *empower girls from diverse backgrounds to overcome disadvantages rather than reinforce their subordination*.



Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the process of gaining control – over self, over resources and over decision making. Feminists working on women’s literacy

⁵⁹ The illustrations are from: Partners for Law and Development, “The Foundational Framework of Cedan”, Ch. 3, pp. 23-26.

expanded⁶⁰ Paolo Freire's notion of "conscientisation" for the poor, and of developing a critical consciousness, to highlight the ways in which gender relations are relations of power; they put forward the concept of women's empowerment.

Empowerment in education implies:

- (i) promoting self-recognition, *a positive self-image and self-actualisation*⁶¹
- (ii) stimulating *critical thinking*
- (iii) deepening *understanding of the gendered structures of power, including gender*
- (iv) enabling *access to resources*, specially to an expanding framework of information and knowledge
- (v) developing the ability to analyse the options available, and to facilitate the possibility of *making informed choices*
- (vi) reinforcing the *agency of girls to challenge gendered structures of power and take control of their lives.*

Empowerment of girls however, is not a product, it is a *process*. It is the process by which they can challenge relations of power and take control of their lives to assert their rights as independent human beings.

The *outcome* of the process of empowerment is a *sharing of power*. However, while the empowerment of women does imply the loss of men's traditional power and control over women's bodies and lives, it also implies that men could be liberated from ideologies of oppression, false value systems and gender stereotypes. Ideally, empowerment should lead to a situation where each person can become an integrated being, and use

his/her fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all.

2.2 Substantive Citizenship

Linking Individual and Collective Gendered Transformation: A critical function of education for equality is to enable girls to claim their rights, as well as contribute actively to the polity as *autonomous and equal citizens* of the future. In a democratic state, citizenship is grounded in equality and justice. Yet women have only been granted *de jure* or *formal* citizenship – in real terms they have traditionally been denied *de facto* or *substantive* citizenship which implies both autonomy and equality in claiming their rights as well as performing their duties as citizens. They have gained entry into active citizenship chiefly as mothers of the future nation, but mothers who are subordinate to their husbands.

The reason for this limitation is that, as the "capabilities approach"⁶² emphasises, *rights and choices in themselves cannot be exercised until central human capabilities are fulfilled* through material, institutional and legal arrangements. And education is an integral part of these arrangements that govern children's lives. Thus in order to enable girls to achieve *substantive and equal citizenship*, it is imperative that the curriculum and pedagogy simultaneously:

- empower learners, specially girls, to overcome disadvantages and develop their capabilities to the fullest at the individual level, and

⁶⁰ While extremely radical and influential in terms of developing a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire's work lacked an analysis of the gendered dimensions of power.

⁶¹ Some of these points are from Batliwala, pp.13, 11.

⁶² Nussbaum, 2000.

- foster in all children a deepened understanding of, and commitment to the constitutional values of justice, equality, citizenship and freedom at the collective level.

The issue of bringing women, who have traditionally been seen as a part of the private domain, into the public domain has been a matter of struggle and tension for policy makers and planners. It is imperative that educationists committed to equality forge the connections between the private and public domains of girls' lives, recognise that capabilities are as central to the claiming of rights as they are to the freedom to shape futures, and

- develop the *individual* capabilities of girls to claim their rights and
- enable them to determine, as free citizens, their role in shaping the *collective* life of a democracy.

2.3 Gender, Education and the Construction of Knowledge

Why Deal with Gender Issues in Education?

Why, precisely, is it important to deal with Gender Issues in Education? How does an inquiry into gender contribute to a quality education? On the other hand, what is the role of education in addressing issues of gender? These questions are at the core of policy related initiatives and strategies in education that set out equality as one of their main objectives.

a. How gendered inquiry can enhance education

Gender critiques have highlighted not just issues of exclusion, marginalisation and oppression but also facilitated a continuous interrogation of what

is seen as knowledge. Feminist scholarship has questioned existing concepts, sharpened the analytical tools of disciplines, identified new areas of inquiry, and created place for the knowledge systems of marginalised sections of society. The social sciences have benefited in a significant way from :

- feminist critiques of hegemonic discourses such as the “feminisation” of the colony, of minority communities and of undercastes, whereby the underprivileged sections are constructed as “feminine”, i.e. “weak” yet also a “threat”, to create ground for a strategic justification of their subordination (much in the way the domination of women is justified)⁶³.
- the radical potential of the linking of the personal and the political that has brought to light forms of oppression hitherto repressed
- the importance given to local, contextualised histories and oral narratives in the shaping of historical knowledge, along with a questioning of existing historical assumptions about social formations.
- the forging of new genres in which knowledge is represented, for example testimonial literature of dalit or mayan women, whereby, through the publication of their narrated testimonies, marginalised group on a global scale are insisting on entering into dialogue with lettered knowledge, from alternative epistemological grounds⁶⁴.

⁶³ Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, 1991

⁶⁴ Panjabi, 2004

b. Experiential knowledge : validation and critique, from the standpoint of the learner

Some central questions in relation to knowledge are – How representative is knowledge of the learners’ experiences of life? Does it address their needs and desires? Does it enable all learners – boys as well as girls – to achieve their fullest potential in terms of their cognitive, creative and analytical abilities?

The mode of enquiry developed through gender studies can enrich educationists, who have been dogged by the question of how well curriculum content is able to represent the actual experiences of the learner. Can the textbook address the lived experiences and perspectives of those on the margins, or even always of those who are privileged? If, for example, textbooks depict families as two-parent two-children units, at the most with a grandparent or two included, as the unexceptional norm, the how would children of the over 30 per cent of single parent (mostly female) headed households, even begin to situate themselves within this world where they are seen as aberrations?

It is important to recognise that education is a *process*, not an input, and experience is a significant part of this process. Unless the learner can locate her/his standpoint in relation to the contexts represented in textbooks, unless s/he can relate this knowledge to his/her lived experiences of society, knowledge is reduced to the level of mere information. If we want to examine how knowledge gained relates to future visions of community life, it is crucial to encourage reflection on *what it means to know something*, how one can use this knowledge towards building a future vision.

Consider, for example, the following responses of young boys that demonstrates how constructions of masculinity oppress not just girls but boys too:

I suppose I learned early that I wasn’t too interested in hanging with all the tough guys because I just thought they spoke a lot of nonsense... People pretend a lot, putting on a front, getting very macho and aggressive. It wasn’t something that I really appreciated, all that fakeness. You just didn’t really understand where they were coming from. One moment they might be your friend and within a split second they wouldn’t be and I didn’t want to deal with it.

What would alternative and more humane, more realistic frameworks of masculinity look like? Clearly, such articulations create the possibilities of questioning assigned gender roles without a didactic talking down to the learner of the values that have to be imbibed.

Implicit in this is a pedagogical approach that centers the learner as a proactive participant in his or her own learning. It validates the *standpoint* of the learner. It also recognises that there is a contradiction between social constructions of reality, which are determined by the relations of ruling, and the learner’s own experiences of this reality. *Ideal* or *mainstream* constructions of the kind we find in textbooks do not take into account the child’s nuanced understanding of his/her world.

Feminist scholarship thus builds upon and links two levels of analysis: structure and agency. Structure looks at social institutions and cultural practices, which create and sustain gender inequalities and link it to other systems of oppressions. The focus on agency honors individual women’s expression of their own experiences and includes individual self-representation and personal voice. Hence feminist scholarship posits the significance of “situated knowledge”, where

knowledge and ways of knowing are specific to a particular historical and cultural context; and the standpoint of the subject/producer of knowledge cannot be divorced from the content of knowledge produced⁶⁵.

c. Diversity and intersectionality

Located at the intersection of categories of caste, class, religion and community, one of the strengths of gender is its *acknowledgement of the diversity of social experiences*. And feminist scholarship argues that the experience of gender relations as they are lived forms a basis for understanding the links between gender and other asymmetric systems. It is critical to account for race, class, ethnicity and culture as well as gender within social inquiry, since gender as a conceptual category clearly does not fully capture the complex web of relations that determine an individual's location in social reality.

Gender analysis does not operate in a vacuum – it always works in tandem with forces of caste, class, religion, ethnicity, and in relation to the rural-urban divide. Gender relations are manifest in very specific and constantly shifting configurations over time and space. Issues of gender have been framed within diverse and more realistic frameworks that take into account the intersectionality of different forces.

From a gendered perspective, the popular representations of “Unity in Diversity” represented in textbooks seem extremely limited and superficial in that they evade more significant issues of diversity in confining themselves to foods of

different regions, or ways of celebrating the festivals of different communities. Other diverse modes of living and being that are integral to people's lives are seldom represented, far less discussed. In fact, the last major educational policy document, rather than argue for the need to enable children to engage with and understand issues of diversity, even denounces aspects of diversity such as the existence of “single parents, unmarried relationships and so on” in contrast to the joint family system, as the result of an “alien technological ethos” that has distanced the elite members of society from “the religio-philosophic ethos” and an “understanding of the heritage of the past.”⁶⁶ Instead it advocates an easy “cohesion” without any understanding of the ground realities, for what is evident in such pronouncements is the lack of knowledge of the lived realities of the poor, rural and marginalised sections of society.

In our context of lived diversities it is critical to acquaint children with the perspectives of different groups, and equally so the gendered standpoints of these groups. Textbooks rarely represent the diverse forms of economic activity the people engage in. Farmers, doctors, teachers, nurses, labourers, shopkeepers and at the most bankers are represented in school textbooks. Other occupations rarely find visual representation nor are they included in the content matter of textbooks. The implicit assumption is that farming is the only economic activity in rural areas and urban spaces are populated only by particular professionals.

⁶⁵ This is not to completely dismiss the relevance of the science because the method is flawed. As Harding convincingly argues that it is equally important acknowledge the political nature of science and that science, like feminism, contains both progressive and regressive tendencies. The challenge is to advance the former and eliminate the latter.

⁶⁶ NCF 2000, pp. 3-4

Thus, one of the critical questions from a gendered perspective is, how can one make the curriculum representative of diversity and intersectionality? Do different linguistic cultures, castes, communities, families and concerns find space within the curricula or are they too ‘add-ons’ like gender, finding token presence in the content of learning? If the education imparted in schools and is based on knowledge that contradicts or erases a majority of forms of social experience, then how can it be enabling or nurturing?

The challenge is to make knowledge relevant to the life-worlds of a diversity of learners, and simultaneously enable them to envision other worlds beyond; that enable them to understand reality, but not remain fixed within a particular reality. Ultimately, aspirations are socially determined, and the marginalised may lack the aspirational resources to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty. Empowering both girls and boys from all sections of society with the “capacity to aspire” must become a central aim of education.⁶⁷

d. How education can redress inequities of gender

When education is viewed in terms of its transformative potential, as a social intervention that works towards re-examining existing realities, then it becomes the single most powerful process for redressing the inequities of gender. It can facilitate the forging of new values and forms of society that would enable both women and men to develop their human capacities to their fullest. An empowering education shares with gender a common project – presenting *images of that which is not yet*⁶⁸ – thereby moving from the given to realising new ways of imagining our future.

***The Paradox of Education and the Internally Contradictory Construction of Knowledge:*As**

argued earlier, the education of women has been justified in the interests of supplementary income generation, lower fertility rates and population control, better mothering skills, upholding “tradition” and spiritual values, and improving social cohesion. Most of these interests address women as instruments for the upkeep of the family and society, effacing their very identity and rights as individual human beings. *The central paradox here is that education, which has been a site for the reproduction of social values and stereotypes which bind and constrain, is also potentially a site for empowerment.*

Moreover, the State and those who “shape” education are also caught in this paradox, with the impetus to reinforce subordination and perpetuate the status-quo on one hand, and take on a progressive mantle on the other. The contradictions and tensions that this situation produces is then replicated in the contradictory messages inherent in the construction of knowledge in textbooks too. As an education activist from Pune observed, “*The same textbook can show women as equal in one lesson, and mock women in another.*”

If education policy is committed to gender equality then this contradiction needs to be addressed squarely, and the development of unambiguously progressive perspectives, in the very construction of knowledge has to be acknowledged as a focus of transformation.

Constructing Alternative Gendered Frameworks of Knowledge and Making Visible the Invisible

The curriculum’s presentation of gender relations is frequently based upon popular assumptions or upon ideas perpetuated by dominant groups. And it normally posits the male as the normative epistemic subject. It rarely takes into account the differentiated contributions, capacities and perspectives of women. *Alternative Gendered Frameworks of Knowledge Required:*

⁶⁷ Arjun Appadurai, cited in Debraj Ray, April 2004

⁶⁸ Bloch.

Men are “Physically Stronger” than Women (?)

Strength is usually measured in terms of who runs faster, jumps higher, carries heavier loads. Physical stamina, thresholds of pain, and longevity, are rarely taken to be indicators of strength.

Men

Run faster

Carry heavier loads

Women

Greater stamina – work longer hours

Jump higher Higher thresholds of pain

Greater longevity of life

This clearly indicates that commonplace notions of physical strength take into account only those activities/experiences in which men demonstrate greater physical strength. This has important implications for how we perceive weakness and socialise children to accept that men are physically stronger, and women weaker. What is needed is a complete alteration of the very framework of “physical strength” itself to make it representative of different forms of strengths - including women’s physical strengths.

“Housewives” Don’t “Work” (?)

Take the case of a surveyor going from door to door recording the number of “working members” of the household. Homemakers would inevitably be left out, for work is usually associated with income generation.

The work of bearing children and hence reproducing labour power, rearing children, and providing the comfort and nourishment required to reproduce the worker for every new day of labour is rendered completely invisible.

A gendered account would render this “invisible” work visible; it would demand equal consideration and valuation of reproductive and domestic work too; and it would require a reconstruction of the very notion of work itself.

“Men” Don’t Cry (?)

Consider a young boy’s critique of the construction of masculinity, as that which contradicts a rational observation of life:

“Some people expect all men to be tough and some think that men should be the income earners, that men never cry, that men shouldn’t show emotions. It’s quite ridiculous because we’re all human, male or female.”

The point is that men too are vulnerable and emotional, but these aspects are made invisible in the interests of constructing images of men as strong, infallible, and hence superior. We need alternative, more realistic and humane constructions of what it means to be a man.

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

The following section outlines a case for the integration of a feminist critique of disciplinary knowledge to inform curriculum. It elaborates on the transformatory potential of restructuring knowledge through a gender lens that makes visible the invisible, and fosters an appreciation of the differentiated capabilities and perspectives of women and men.

2.4 Through the Gendered Looking Glass: Articulating a Feminist⁶⁹ Critique of Disciplinary Knowledge⁷⁰

In the past two decades feminist critiques, nationally as well as globally, have been instrumental in challenging accepted definitions and expanding the extant boundaries of knowledge across disciplines through critical engagement with traditionally excluded issues relating to gender and other social inequalities relating to caste, class, race, and ethnicity. At the intellectual level, the critique encompasses a number of challenges to established ideas, including insights into the nature of power and hierarchy, analysis of the importance of gender division of labour, the division between public and private, and a re-valuing of women’s experiences. Feminist critique of knowledge is inextricably linked to political practice, which includes struggles for equal opportunity and economic independence, struggles

against male domination over reproduction and women’s sexuality, and struggles for a more just society.⁷¹

The linkages between gender and curriculum are complex and challenging. School textbooks are a crucial component in the acquisition of knowledge and unless syllabi are revised to incorporate a gendered perspective—along with other marginalised perspectives—schooling will reproduce the narrow biases—and the narrow basis of mainstream social science knowledge. It is important to recognise that regardless of all the work produced by feminist scholars unless a gender perspective is incorporated in the syllabi each generation of children will absorb the biases of existing ways of understanding society and reproduce these ways of thinking into the future.

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

⁶⁹ The word “feminist” is used here in a broad sense to refer to all those ideas which address as well as persons who seek to end women’s subordination.

⁷⁰ This section provides a comprehensive overview of the critiques of traditional disciplines across the sciences and humanities. For a more detailed critique of select individual disciplines, including History, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, Science & Technology, Mathematics, and Language please refer to the Appendix.

⁷¹ Harding 1991, Collins 1989, Rege 2003

This does not in anyway imply that in the current school curriculum, gender is singularly absent. On the contrary, several efforts have been implemented by NCERT and DPEP to ensure “gender sensitivity” in school textbooks and classrooms. However, the oft-preferred and expedient way to accomplish the task of addressing gender in the curriculum is thematically: that is ever so often we add a perfunctory write-up on women in individual disciplines. History is always about Rani Laxmi Bai, Noor Jahan, or Razia Sultan and the science textbooks just might mention Gargi and Maitreyi. This strategy may mark a good faith beginning; however at the same time this mechanical approach to the inclusion of gender into the syllabi—what scholars now term the ‘add women and stir’ approach — makes absolutely no difference to the rest of the syllabus as some recent reviews of the textbooks show, despite various guidelines issued by the various educational policies since the mid eighties. Thus gender either remains invisible or relegated to being a “women’s issue” and is treated as an additional problem to be investigated through existing techniques; that is merely sprinkling ‘women’ on an otherwise unchanged androcentric (male-centred) disciplinary landscape. Since human beings are central to the social sciences, the limitations of the male centered knowledge are much more visible here as the analysis of disciplines from a gender point of view provided below indicates.

History continues to remain the monopoly of men, especially few powerful men while women are relegated to a mere mechanical enumeration of such and such women who ‘also’ on occasion wielded power (like Razia Begum, Nurjahan or Rani Lakshmbai). The primary reason for this exclusion is the limited disciplinary focus on power, narrowly associated with momentous events that resulted in

shifts of power in time and understood as being operative only in the public domain. Feminist historians have therefore argued that given the sexual division of labour, and the concurrent creation of a public/private dichotomy and the hierarchy of values attached to them, women will remain marginal in any account of history. Hence, what is required is a paradigm shift in the framework of history – move beyond merely being the history of production to the history of social reproduction—of the reproduction of the household and of the labour-force and human and cultural resources more generally. Unless this happens women will never feature adequately in history in a way that does justice to their work, their lives and the totality of their experiences.

A similar blindness to issues of power and the unproblematic reinforcement of the public and private dichotomy is also evident in **Economics**. The discipline, especially its hegemonic neo-classical variant, has presumed the subject of all economic action to be a rational maximising being individual (who does possess a gender, class, caste, or ethnic identity) who *always* acts in self-interested ways and the “market” as the central criterion for defining ‘economic’ activity. Both the household and social constructs of the family with their internal stratification and dynamics of power along the lines of gender and age have tended to be conceptually and analytically left out of the mainstream disciplinary frame. Consequently a large proportion of women’s work, primarily unpaid activities in producing goods and services for family consumption, along with domestic production and voluntary community work have been rendered invisible by the dominance of the “market”.

It is important to explore the “economics of gender”: how gender differences lead to different economic outcomes for the sexes in terms of earnings,

income, poverty rates, hours of work, and other standards used by economist to determine economic well being. As opposed to the “atomised” individual, it is important to acknowledge that economic agents can be male or female, and they interact in families as well as in firms and in markets.⁷² Economic inquiry needs to expand its focus to include theoretical models based on two sexes (instead of “naturally” subsuming women under men), empirical work that addresses similarities and differences between the sexes, and analysis of economic policies that affect the sexes differently

Mainstream **Sociology** illustrates the limitations of a misplaced integration of gender concerns and reminds us that although feminist scholarship involves dealing with the social position of women, not all the theoretical works that discuss women and women’s issues can claim to be informed by feminism. *Within substantive sociology the focus is on* structures such as caste, class, tribe, family, culture and *processes* such as modernisation, westernisation, sanskritisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and lately globalisation, where perforce it is not easy to ignore the presence of women. Accordingly the problem never was that women were entirely absent. Indeed sociology is popularly considered a soft option and therefore more suited for women students.

However, neither the structures nor processes are seen as gendered entities and the fact that these structures and processes mean different things to men and women are often overlooked. For example in one NCERT textbook, a chapter on population and demography is included but the adverse female sex ratio is not mentioned. Sex ratio is mentioned in a sub-section on women in a chapter on deprived groups. This mode of treating gender stems not so much from

not knowing that gender is important; rather from a flawed understanding that a *gender perspective implies adding women as a topic or chapter* or at the most *by making women visible, or by enumerating women’s issues as social problems*. As a consequence in sociology (along with History as well as Political Science), there has been the inclination to focus on questions of women’s ‘status’ rather than to the structure of gender relations—of constructing an idealised ‘Indian’ society, with idealised institutions like the Indian joint family with other types of arrangements being implicitly regarded as aberrant. This trend has tended to essentialise both ‘Indian’ institutions and ‘Indian’ women. This tendency has been a major obstruction to the possibility of either meaningfully gendering the social science disciplines or of making transformations in the male-centred paradigms that currently dominate the disciplines.

In **Political Science** too the focus on power has now led to bringing gender in mechanically with a paternalistic statist approach with possible chapters in syllabi on women’s ‘empowerment’ or the debates on reservations for women, especially with regard to the 72nd and 73rd amendment. However, the main subject and the theory remains centered on a masculinist political theory with perhaps a footnote on the feminist critiques of such theories. The mainstream discipline is largely focused on politics in the narrow sense – party politics and party systems, elections and electoral alliances between different groups in Indian society, transformation of institutions. There are compelling reasons to expand the definition of “political” to include whole new areas of activity, many of them involving women as legitimate areas of study. First, ‘politics’ does not have the same impact on women as it does on men, and this needs differential impact needs

⁷²Folbre 1994, Jacobsen 1994

to be investigated. Second, the political process often alters gender relations and this needs to be explored. Third, women often participate as political subjects in political activity in different ways to men, which raises questions about the distinctiveness of women's political activity – should it be classified as and analysed as a separate entity? Addressing these questions has important implications for the study of politics as it has been conventionally understood.⁷³

Among the social sciences, **Geography** seems to be the most impervious to gender analysis and restructuring of knowledge. A possible reason for this could be the fact that although women make up half the world's population, they constitute a miniscule portion of academic geographers, especially in India. According to Rose,⁷⁴ geography as a masculinist discipline is stuck in dualistic thinking and in producing grand theories that claim to speak for everyone but that actually speak only for white, bourgeoisie, heterosexual males. In turn feminist critiques argue gender is not merely incidental to geography but is in fact a driving force in the making of the spatial scales and environments where social life unfolds. In the masculinist discourse, space itself appears as being ungendered, a seemingly open path to anywhere. However, we know that that some spaces offer particular constraints to women, and may in fact mean horror and violence to women, such as when we walk through the city at night. Does the cultural landscape reflect the presence of men and women equally? Are places equally comfortable, safe even, for women and

men? Do we as teachers of geography create classroom environments that are equitable for all our students? These are some of the questions that critiques of mainstream geography attempt to answer.

The point of departure for most feminist critiques of scientific knowledge⁷⁵ has been the mainstream scientific method originally devised by natural scientists and later emulated by the social science. Unlike the social sciences, the pure sciences like Mathematics have always claimed “objectivity” as their justification for excluding what they consider are “subjective” notions of gender and other social inequalities. The scientific method upholds “objectivity” as a place to begin the process of theorising and also view it as the outcome of that process. Theories, developed using the scientific method, are held out as rational, value-free and neutral. Critics argue that modern science with its professed objectivity, far from demolishing biased perceptions about women, is actually strengthening them. The organised knowledge of the ancient ages (or sciences), often viewed women as unique creatures, distinct from men. These sciences rationalised that women were incomplete men and thus inferior. The ‘science’ of craniology claimed that women were intellectually inferior because of their lighter brains. The fact that corrections for body size were ignored indicates that the processes of science are not free from bias.⁷⁶

In addition, the language used in the scientific circles also reinforces the masculine image of science. These ideas gradually took strong roots in the social milieu. Genderised language continues even today in science, perhaps in a

⁷³ Waylen, 1996

⁷⁴ Cited in Morin 1995

⁷⁵ *While the role of gender is unique to feminist critiques of knowledge, they engage and build on a history of pre-feminist and non-feminist critiques; and hence it is essential to place them within a broader historical discourse. However, given the focused mandate of the current exercise, this review is unable to do justice to the history of the critique.*

⁷⁶ Gould 1981

less offensive manner than in the past. The objective sciences (mathematics, physics) are dubbed as *hard* sciences with the implied connotation of being masculine, while the subjective branches of knowledge (sociology, psychology) are dubbed the *soft* sciences, implying that they are more relevant to women. The stereotypes they generate are self-fulfilling. Far fewer women opt for mathematics and physics than for other subjects.⁷⁷

The primary criticism leveled against “objectivity” is that knowledge created by the scientific method is not value free, neutral or general to the extent it is claimed to be. In fact feminists view scientific knowledge as being socially constructed and as such structured by the political, social, and economic values of the culture within which it is practised. They assert that the claim to scientific objectivity in actuality masks the relationship between knowledge and power. Implicit in such ‘objectivity’ are hierarchical dichotomies, which construct reality across gender lines: these include reason versus emotion, culture versus nature, universal versus particular, and objective versus subjective. The former is associated with science, rationality, and the masculine and is consistently privileged over the latter, corresponding to the non-scientific, the irrational and the feminine. This assignment of gender metaphors to social realities results in a partial, dichotomised and distorted vision of the world whereby deviations from the male norm are considered inferior.

Hence, women have historically had limited access to **Science and Technology** (S&T) and are almost excluded from intellectual, scientific and technological communities. They have always been associated with nurturance, child rearing and house-keeping. Areas, in

which women have excelled, such as, nutrition and midwifery, were never considered part of S&T. Further, the contribution of women to S&T also remains “hidden from history” as documentation is rare.⁷⁸

The image of S&T as male-only domains also remains as the dominant perception in most students’ minds. Studies have shown that young children, given information of generic language such as “mankind” and “he” draw pictures of men and boys when asked to visually present the information or story they had heard.⁷⁹ How do students view science and scientists? In a study conducted at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education,⁸⁰ girls and boys drew a male scientist, who was young and worked alone, in a chemistry laboratory. They used masculine pronouns (he, his) when referring to scientists in the singular.

With respect to technology the perception that what women do is non-technological persists, despite their involvement in survival technologies since the dawn of history. One cause for this perception lies in the way we define technology.

Various socio-cultural factors keep women from entering fields that are overtly called technology. The gender stereotyping of jobs is remarkably ubiquitous. One result of such all-pervading stereotypes is that women may choose to avoid areas that are hostile to them directly and which indirectly the society is hostile to as career choices for women. This is confirmed by the low percentage of women entering fields, labelled S&T. Women account for only 9 per cent of the scientific personnel in India (Expert group meeting on training of women graduates in the development process, Thailand, 1999).

⁷⁷ Jones and Wheatley 1988

⁷⁸ Mackenzie, D. and Wajzman, J. (eds), 1985

⁷⁹ Martyna 1978, in Rosser 1993

⁸⁰ Chunnawala and Ladage, 1990

Similarly, the assumption of **Mathematics** as a discipline exemplifying perfect rational and logical argumentation gives it an exalted status in the school curriculum of the modern nation state, which places the rational, detached, autonomous epistemic subject at its centre. This construction is premised on an understanding that mathematics constitutes the highest point of human reason, that ‘logico-mathematical structures are the structures of rational thought’.⁸¹ While mathematics appears to be value free and to report universal truths, in reality, are based on masculine values and perceptions. The construction of this ‘masculinist domain’ is aided by the complete lack of references in textbooks to women mathematicians, the absence of social concerns in the designing of curricula which would enable children questioning received gender ideologies and the absence of reference to women’s lives in problems. A study of mathematics textbooks found that in the problem sums, not a single reference was made to women’s clothing, although several problems referred to the buying of cloth, etc.⁸² Classroom research also indicates a fairly systematic devaluation of girls as incapable of ‘mastering’ mathematics, even when they perform reasonably well at verbal as well as cognitive tasks in mathematics.

It is important to acknowledge that mathematical competence is situated and shaped by the social situations and the activities in which learning occurs. However, school mathematics has little relation to the social worlds of children where they are engaged in mathematical activities as a part of daily life. Open-ended problems, involving multiple approaches and not solely based on arriving at a final, unitary, correct answer are absent in the way mathematics is approached in our schools. An overriding assumption

of school mathematics is that an external source of validation (the teacher, textbooks, and guidebooks) is always needed for mathematical claims. This approach acts to disadvantage all learners, but often acts to disadvantage girls in particular.

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

It is also argued that language does not merely project something that is out there and already existing but also shapes and constitutes it as well as our attitudes towards it. Thus using language differently can actually change conditions and situations. Students should therefore be taught that language matters, not only on the superficial level of “political correctness” but on the deeper level of changing attitudes and thereby situations that obtain in the world. Using the word “black” instead of “negro” or “differently abled” instead of “disabled” or “sex worker” instead of “prostitute” is not just about greater social acceptability but about being aware of histories

⁸¹ Walkerdine, 1988, pp.6

⁸² AWAG, 1988

of oppression, segregation and moral condemnation and the will to change it.

The above review clearly indicates that the focus on gender has resulted in the interrogation of the androcentric assumptions inherent in the scientific theory and practices, reconstruction of the knowledge production along feminist lines, and the rewriting of women into history. What has traditionally constituted knowledge and why? How does a feminist lens overcome disciplinary fragmentation in knowledge production? Who is a knower? Do all people have the same right to be creators of knowledge? These are some questions that feminist critiques have actively sought to explore. It is also important to highlight here that while these critiques have centred on gender as the analytical category, however the same critiques have also constantly acknowledged that gender is not a homogenous category; it too is stratified along the lines of caste, class, ethnicity, race, tribe, religion among others. Hence any analysis has to take the “intersectionality” of women’s and girls’ experiences into account.⁸³

In addition, knowledge, teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of opening up knowledge to gendered inquiry rather than “fixing it” in established moulds; of educating students to think critically, struggle with relations of power, and envisage versions of a world which is not “yet”.⁸⁴ The hope for transformation lies in the struggle of human freedom against power.

2.5 Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum

A gender-just and empowering curriculum should have the potential to enable students to critically engage with and challenge received knowledge about fixed gender

identities. Insights from women’s studies and the women’s movement both in this country and in other parts of the world over the past twenty years have enriched our understanding of how education can form a part of this project of possibility.

Experiences of literacy activists and those engaged in teaching women’s studies at the university level show that it is possible to integrate gender into the curriculum, not as marginal or incidental but as critical to the content of different subject areas. The content itself can then be made to take on wider dimensions, involving various subject areas in the school curriculum. Feminist critiques of knowledge also have the potential to influence more just and inclusive pedagogical practices and facilitate creation of “child-friendly” classrooms that empower students as well as teachers. They open up possibilities for gender inclusion in an integrated approach within and across different core academic areas of the school curriculum.

Assuming that the evolutionary approach to education involves building upon experiences and thought structures that are familiar, the curriculum will have to be designed such that it helps the child critically understand her surroundings before recognising and negotiating other contexts. The themes that become important in such a context will have to relate to work, body, sexuality, marriage, parenthood, family, caste, community, state, modernity, economy, violence, conflict, heterogeneity and hierarchy. These cross cut into language, social science and science. As against the surfeit of information that is sought to be passed on to the student, the emphasis should be on introducing these issues and developing critical thinking through them. These themes could be taken up in each of the

⁸³ Rege, 2003

⁸⁴ Simon, 375

An example of an integrated approach across disciplines: A Curricula module developed by Nirantar for rural girls and women.⁸⁵

PROPERTIES OF WATER

How does rainfall occur?	<p>THREE STATES OF WATER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Water cycle ● Rainfall ● Monsoon
<p>How do plants absorb nutrients from the soil?</p> <p>How does water get polluted?</p>	<p>SOLVENCY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plant nutrition ● Water pollution
How does life exist in water?	<p>OXYGEN CONTENT</p> <p>Life in water</p>

WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

<p>Where does water come from?</p> <p>How are seas, oceans, rivers formed?</p>	<p>NATURAL SOURCES OF WATER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rivers, lakes, seas ● Underground water
What are our local water resources?	<p>WATER RESOURCE MAPPING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local/regional/national
<p>Why do wells dry up?</p> <p>How do handpumps work?</p> <p>Are big dams more beneficial than small dams?</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURAL AND MAN-MADE SOURCES OF WATER</p> <p>Understanding the water table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Handpumps ● Systems of irrigation ● Environmental impact of big dams
<p>How do people in desert areas procure water?</p> <p>What causes droughts?</p>	<p>WATER IN DIFFERENT ECO-SYSTEMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Water sources in desert areas ● Water sources in mountainous regions ● Droughts and floods

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WATER

Who controls the village well?	<p>CASTE AND CLASS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Purity and pollution ● Control over water resources
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⁸⁵ *Windows to the World, Nirantar, 1997, pp. 90-91.*

<p>Who fetches water? Do we have enough water?</p>	<p>GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR AND WATER AVAILABILITY OF WATER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local and regional agitations for drinking and irrigation water ● Government structure: Water Department ● Alternative efforts at making water available.
<p>Why is clean water essential?</p>	<p>HEALTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Body's need for water ● Right to potable water ● Water borne diseases

subjects that are taught at school at every stage. Complexity in thinking can be introduced as the stages advance. Higher stage here would therefore indicate strengthening of critical tools rather than accumulation of information.

Pedagogy

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

underprivileged backgrounds, especially girls, as the worlds they inhabit and their realities are underrepresented.

Learning from Conflict: If children's social experiences are to be brought into classrooms, it is inevitable that issues of conflict must be addressed. Conflict is an inescapable part of children's lives. They constantly encounter situations which call for moral assessment and action, whether in relation to subjective experiences of conflict involving the self, family and society, or in dealing with exposure to violent conflict in the contemporary world. Yet the official curriculum tends to treat knowledge as neutral, erasing conflict in order to legitimise a certain vision of society and its knowledge, a vision that is related to dominant discourses.⁸⁶

Learning about alternate ways of being – or ways of being that are usually made invisible or delegitimised – involves 'unlearning' gender, both at the individual and collective levels. To enable children to do this, the curriculum has to accommodate pedagogic strategies that deal with the idea of conflict, between what is observed and valued in contemporary society, in the

⁸⁶ Apple:1979; Kumar:1996

social worlds that children inhabit, and what *can* be in a gender-just and less violent world. To use conflict as a pedagogic strategy is to enable children to deal with conflict and facilitate awareness of its nature and role in their lives.

Participation- Most feminist educators understand that knowledge is not neutral, that the teacher and students alike bring ‘texts’ of their own to the classroom which shape the transactions within it.⁸⁷ Feminist pedagogy emphasises participatory learning and teaching, within which subjectivity, emotion and experience have a definite and valued place. While participation is a powerful strategy, its pedagogic edge is blunted when it is ritualised. Participation, when seen as an instrument to achieve certain specified, predetermined objectives and where the teacher’s own ideas dominate classroom discussions is not meaningful. It involves appreciation of the importance of starting from experience of both students and teachers.

Gendered play in School

Play is inextricably a part of childhood, however its manifestation is to a large extent shaped by where, with whom and who is playing. In the following note an attempt has been made to focus on how play is fashioned by gender in a school setting. This is based on observations of primary school children in municipal schools settings, in the context of play being a developmental phenomenon.

Both children and teachers perceive school as a place to learn/work as opposed to “play” In fact a “good” student is perceived as one who does not “play”. Despite this unwritten belief, children do play during breaks and at other times when they are not under the “eye” of an adult and are “free”. We are referring to

play as a free-choice activity, organised by the players themselves, which is usually an end in itself and not formal games/sports.

Clear gender difference have been observed in what, and where, children play, indicative of an existing socialisation pattern, which appears to be restrictive for girls in terms of exposure and willingness to experiment.

1. In outdoor play, girls are usually found playing “langdi” (hopping) and versions of hopscotch; whereas boys play cricket with equipment made from throw away material, such as crumpled paper for a ball, or a stick for a bat, or a tree stump for wickets. They also play catching and abadubi (versions of bal and running games).
2. Indoor games in the classroom usually constitute sequencing of film songs/episodes from television serials for girls and book cricket or horseplay for boys.
3. The play space boundaries used by girls are usually clearly demarcated before play – either naturally or by the girls themselves – and do not involve the girls moving more than 10 feet away from the central location of play. The boys, however, use whatever space is available and even playgrounds in the vicinity of the school.
4. Gender segregation occurs during group play. In the girls group, the rules are enforced and they usually verbally discipline any player who does not follow the rules, and rarely allow for excuses. Whereas boys are more flexible and use physical strength to ensure “just” participation.
5. Even in formal games/sports it is boys who typically participate. The games usually offered involve longer duration of stay in school, and play with equipment. Besides, the physical/games/sports instructor is usually male.

⁸⁷ Culley, M. and Portuges, C., 1985 .

In the context of the school curriculum, we need to ensure that “free” and “formal” play, enables girls to sense and experience space, mobility, and experimentation, something socialisation does not otherwise permit them to experience.

Source: Meera Oke, Director, SOHAM-Training Research Development, Pune

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

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

songs, paintings etc need to be brought in to create a dynamic interaction between learners themselves. Lateral learning processes necessitate new equations between the teacher and the student.

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

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

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

What kinds of practical outcomes are likely to arise from such a pedagogy? These will differ in different educational settings (by location, background of learners, and also different subjects). However, we are likely to see:⁸⁸

- changes to curriculum and to classroom organisation which allow for increased participation of girls and women (and other under-represented groups of students);
- encouragement of questioning the curriculum and what counts as school knowledge;
- breaking down of hierarchies and power-networks that exclude girls and women, whether as pupils or teachers;
- greater understanding of the conditions which lead to bullying, racism and sexism, and homophobic behaviour, and more successful forms of intervention;
- greater valuing of pupils' experience and knowledge, and closer involvement of students in planning and evaluating their educational work;
- increased critical consciousness among students and ability to challenge narrowed conceptions, prejudices and stereotypes;

- stronger sense of agency whereby students (and their teachers, parents etc.) envision an expanded and divergent future.

2.6. Teachers as Agents of Change –Teacher Training

Pedagogical and curricula changes cannot be realised without the teacher – who is at the forefront of the teaching-learning process. Despite her role as a catalyst in this process she has become an instrument for the transfer of information. The preoccupation of education policy with this role is reiterated in NCF (2000) which highlights that, “in the pre-service teacher preparation programmes adequate emphasis on the content knowledge of different subject areas and proper integration of methods of teaching with the content of school subjects and a strong component of ‘Evaluation’ will have to be ensured”⁸⁹. It recommends trainings in order to better equip teachers to handle “new generation packages”. Thus, while the transformative creative and learning needs of children are recognised, teachers are rarely foregrounded in such concerns. The teacher thus becomes a mere transactor of knowledge rather than a creator of knowledge.

Identity Formation and the Teacher: As mentioned earlier, the teacher, the learning environment and practices within the school coalesce to affirm roles and attitudes. A process that begins within the home gets re-established and consolidated within the school. As Berger and Luckmann⁹⁰ point out, the process of identity formation occurs with the child internalising the roles and attitudes of the significant 'other' (family members). According to them, secondary socialisation,

⁸⁸ Weiner, G. 2004.

⁸⁹ NCF 2000, NCERT pp.110

⁹⁰ Berger and Luckmann point to secondary socialisation as following Primary socialisation, which takes place at home within an emotionally charged environment. “Secondary socialisation is a subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society”. Berger and Luckmann, 1996, pp.150.

A RURAL SCHOOL TEACHER'S EXPERIMENT WITH GENDER ISSUE

I am a teacher in a higher secondary school in a rural area. While teaching the excretory system in a 10th standard science classroom, I thought that the topic could be initiated by talking about those things that are thrown out of our homes when we try to clean it (water, solid wastes). So first of all I drew an outline of a house on the board. In the village, cooking is done with wood as a fuel in the majority of homes. So I drew a CHULA and nearby I drew a man roasting chapattis. In order that I not communicate



an incorrect message, that only men should do housework, I also drew a female rolling chapattis. I drew this picture because I wanted to show smoke going out of the house in order to start a discussion on the topic.

But a volley of questions greeted me, such as:

- Madam, what is this? Why are you making the “poor” man prepare chapattis?
 - Such things may happen in urban areas, not in our homes.
 - It is women’s work to prepare food and take care of house.
- If man does house work, than who will go out to work and earn money?
 - Will women take ploughs and go to the fields?

In response to these I raised a few questions.

- Is a person who works in the home a “poor” person? If so, then why should women too work in the home? In fact it is thanks to the house work done by women, that men can go out and earn. And a woman who goes out to earn has a double work load, she works in the house and works outside the home too.
- Does anyone ask the woman, whether she likes doing housework or not?
- Does anyone ask a man if he would prefer to do housework or work outside the home?
- Distribution of work on the basis of sex - is this division right or wrong? We all have to accept that boys and men can take important responsibility in house work.

Then one student said, “Madam, but this has been going on for decades.” I said; “So should the things which have been going since a long time go on in future also? If our ancestors had taken this stand, then would we not still be walking on four legs?”

The discussion came to an end, and my words seemed to have been in vain. The majority of the girls were sitting silently and the boys had adopted an aggressive posture. Yet, the creases on some foreheads and the eyes concentrating on something far away in the distance, told me that I should find more opportunities more such discussions in the future.

Suggestion: Gender issues should be raised in the teaching of every subject.

A school teacher from Dewas, M.P.

that which takes place within particular institutions like the school has a “brittle” and “unreliable” subjective reality and requires special techniques to produce identification or internalisation. It is in this context that the teacher acquires significance in building the child’s specific location in the world

Erikson however, also identifies adolescence as a critical stage in identity formation. The onset of adolescence for Erikson is a time where given and internalised norms and ideas are questioned again. Young people are concerned more about how they are seen by others around them, which in turn helps them to experience a sense of themselves.⁹¹ An outcome of psychosocial as well as social constructions of everyday processes is a developing consciousness within the child of her family’s location in a specific world. The school teacher plays an important role in maintaining, modifying and reshaping her understanding of location, in terms of her class, caste, gender, religion, sexuality and region.

In the present scenario, where a significant number of children belonging to diverse groups bring with them a variety of cultural practices, knowledge systems and ways of seeing, an understanding of identity becomes critical for the teacher.

What then would be expected from the teacher? Initiating processes of placing value on the world of the learner while simultaneously developing abilities in the child to reflect on her world and engage with new forms of knowledge, the teacher could facilitate the child towards positive identity formation. This would require the teacher to ‘Unlearn’ her own given assumptions regarding norms, values and ideals. In

the absence of this, the teacher’s own biases and pre conceptions would make the adoption of such objectives and pedagogies mere rhetorical statements to be enacted through mechanical, ritualised processes.

Locating the Teacher : Yet we are also aware that the teacher herself is deeply embedded in given structures of power. As a profession school teaching has been seriously impacted by the inclusion of para teachers and policy initiatives that have led to the non-formalisation of the school system.⁹² At the lowest rung of the education bureaucracy, teachers have had minimal say in terms of tasks allotted to them of census data gathering, surveys etc. that cut into their teaching time.

Within the classroom, social realities permeate in covert and overt ways. Teacher’s often belong to social groups that have had access to education and have traditionally exercised power over those coming to the school as first generation learners. At the same time, the introduction of para teachers in areas of low educational participation have brought in para teachers, some of whom belong to SC/ST groups. However, in the educational hierarchy they are even further ‘down’ the ladder. The picture is further complicated with the panchayat raj handing the responsibility of the school to panchayats. Accountable to the community and at the same time vulnerable to local pressures the teacher functions within a circumscribed space, with myriad social realities impacting on her. Female teachers⁹³ experience inequities not only in their own families and communities but within the school itself. From subtle distinctions regarding who will take charge of tea and refreshments in a school event to cases of sexual harassment, the school mirrors the larger social realities of women.

⁹¹ Erikson, 1950, pp.227

⁹² Kumar, Priyam and Saxena point to how para teachers has been hired on a contractual basis at 1/5 or 1/4 of regular salary with a corresponding decrease in full time appointments. They further argue that a para teacher has been seen as the low cost alternative by the DPEP programme as they are chosen mostly from the local community. Kumar, Priyam and Saxena, 2001, pp. 565-566.

⁹³ According to Select Educational Statistics released by the MHRD in 2001-2002 the proportion of women teachers in primary schools was 35% while in upper primary of was 38%.

These realities cannot be ignored. However the content of teacher trainings, B.Ed courses and refresher courses for in-service and pre-service teachers, do not provide them opportunities for self-reflection or introduction to processes of looking at their own socialisation process. Teacher's trainings, courses and refresher programmes introduce theories of learning and information as abstract, atomised knowledge creating no space for teachers to undergo a transformatory experience themselves – of reading theory in a personalised way. There is no systematic planning done to enable teachers to analyse their own assumptions. This translates into teacher's being unable to reconceptualise school knowledge nor are they able to integrate experience with content. Teachers and teacher educators who have never had the space or training to systematically think about the formation of their own identity will themselves be unable to be transformed. As a result, they will not be in a position to adopt such processes of learning that integrate supposedly innovative pedagogies, content and syllabi.

The Problem with Gender Input : The strategy till now has been to introduce gender as a specific input in the form of a session or in terms of days for in service teachers. The dilemma of this add-on approach is evident in the DPEP document describing their efforts to remove gender bias in their programme. *“As a few trainings are not considered adequate to bring about attitudinal changes, the best compromise has been to stress the criticality of being able to recognise one's own biases and act upon them to maintain a gender bias free approach in one's work. This is expected to make teachers aware of the prevalent attitudinal problems and at the same time gear them up to make conscious efforts to avoid/ minimise discriminatory practices that can be very damaging for the manifestation and growth of potentials in*

*a girl child”*⁹⁴. The perspective may be right but the problem of time bound, selective inputs is evident

*“The time spent on gender issues as been varied. The subject has usually been transacted over one or two sessions or at most in one day. Gujarat has on the contrary spent three days on the gender training of CRC and BRC Coordinations, education administrators and DIET faculty.”*⁹⁵

Just three days to reflect exclusively on gender yields its own problems. Isolated from self- reflective pedagogies and processes of learning the teacher can view such inputs as meaningless. Often the reaction to a gender input by teachers and teacher educators is to see it as ‘worthless’ knowledge. Everyday experience cannot, in their hierarchy of knowledge, become the basis of upgradation of skills as a teacher. In situations where gender based discussions generate questions regarding existing realities it is seen as threatening and accused of creating conflict. More lecture, fact and information based sessions lead to teachers viewing gender in as a formal, mechanical aspect of the principle of equality.

Gender lists of “dos and don't” have been formulated for teachers in the last two decades by different educational institutions. For example:

- Home management must be represented as joint responsibility
- Show men in caring, nurturing roles
- Develop respect for work within and outside home
- Girls must be shown in active, positive roles.

Such universalisms in themselves do not communicate much to the teacher as they are rarely developed with their participation or involvement of teachers.

As a result, gender inputs are in the danger of become ‘boxed’ into situations where they either generate denial, anger or mockery on behalf of the participants.

⁹⁴ DPEP Report 2000, pp. 90.

⁹⁵ DPEP Report 2000, pp. 75.

A look at the curriculum of NCERT affiliated Regional Institute of Education (RIE) Mysore B.Ed. course reveals the weightage given to gender. The RIE, Mysore, course is for 2 years (4 semesters) and has 30 courses. Only in one unit of the paper – “Education in Emerging Indian Society” in sub section 4 – we find a topic “problems of poverty, inequality, unemployment, underprivileged groups, SC/ST, minorities and women. In the session work topics suggested, one of the topics is – role of education in achieving gender equality. If this is the weightage given in one of the premier institutions in a 2-year B.Ed. Course to discussing gender issues, then how can we expect other B.Ed. colleges to offer anything more? The earlier B.Ed. curriculum (1999-2000) of RIE, Mysore at least offered an optional paper on women education, which seems to have been discontinued.

- In a scenario where school teaching as a profession is threatened by an increasing shift to para- teachers and contract based teachers it is important to have long term vision on in teachers training. Pre-service training must be of high quality and intensive. Links between pre-service and in-service trainings need to be made involving considerable creativity and planning.
- Teacher’s trainings, whether pre-service or in-service need to have a vision of the teacher herself as a learner engaged in inquiry and reflection. Developing a gender perspective through teacher education necessarily requires a pedagogic approach that allows not just systematic study of gender theory but also an engagement within their own position in society vis a vis gender roles.
- In pre-service courses-whether organised by DIETs, SCERTs, Universities and colleges – papers on identity formation need to be made compulsory. As part of this paper, work must be included that enables the teacher to look at school knowledge and processes of socialisation in a practical manner. This would integrate gender in more meaningful ways than having only a single, separate paper on gender.
- Space needs to be provided within such courses to build teachers abilities to make linkages between theory and real life situations. This implies both rigorous systematic and intensive forms of observation and not just teaching practices. It would strengthen the teacher’s ability to conceptualise from a given experience. In addition to this, research skills need to be made part of the initial input given to teachers. This, in our view, would greatly enhance the role of the teacher in generating and reflecting on her own experiences and observations. Research grants need to be provided to teachers to encourage them to channel their work into research material emerging from within the school. These would serve as breaks from regular teaching and create an active situation of learning and energising the teacher.
- Such research by teachers can become part of the DIET and SCERT training material. It can also through a journal or magazine be shared amongst teachers, educationists and subject specialists.
- Partnerships between teacher training colleges, in service teachers, universities and educational institutions need to be created in the form of projects that are mutually enriching for all involved.

The Way Forward

Experiences: Teaching the ‘Gender and Schooling’ paper by a B.El.Ed lecturer in Delhi.

It’s a challenging course to teach – involving teaching theory, facts and ideas – and relating these to the student’s lives. There’s space to actually use feminist methodologies to teach it.

Using Creative Methodologies

1. The B.El.Ed. students bring newspaper/magazine articles: we discuss these thoroughly.
2. Watch serials, films and popular programmes and develop media analysis skills. Let students say just what they feel and think, encourage them to simply express and articulate.
3. Facilitate intense debate over issues – for example ‘capital punishment for rape’ – whatever is exercising their minds and emotions.
4. Take B.El.Ed. students to field trips (when possible to work it out) to a grassroots group in a slum area for preliminary research – evolving strong response and awareness.
5. Experiential learning – helping students draw links between internship experience and the wider situation in our country/and world.
6. Reflecting – going deeper into issues students bring up. I learn all the time from them, too.
7. Emotional support – help with voicing anger, pain, frustration, as well as joys, dreams and hopes – importance of working through issues and developing balance.

I have learnt it’s important – and possible – to make the course come alive for students in a very personal manner. Issues need to be raised in a very gentle way, creating a safe space for sharing, sometimes intensely personal issues. Also, the effort is directed at teasing and challenging the mind and the imagination, yet not threatening the identities or invading comfort zones of students. Gradually the mind begins to develop tools for analysis of everyday realities – ask small questions, sometimes big.

Their going into schools is a very interesting process – and it adds value to integrate it within the teaching. They discover their own selves becoming authority figures, with greater power and privileges over children... On the other hand the established teachers often treat them as subordinates, and students too can be difficult to deal with. Women have young students writing them ‘love’ letters – ‘Didi I love you’ with a lot of emotional content, jealousy about ‘who she likes more/less’ etc. Our students notice a great deal of difference in the girls and boys in school. Girls are absent for sibling care, with less attention paid to their clothing, nutrition, homework time and so on... In school also there is differential treatment... The course helps them think how to tackle all this – now and in the future.

- Handbooks and resource materials need to be developed that tie in with specific subject areas and provide not just information but strategies on how a teacher can conduct sessions.
- Substantive support mechanisms need to be developed for teachers who are enthused to implement new ideas and pedagogies as part of their training. The education bureaucracy must play

a supportive role with the objective of nurturing initiative emerging from within the school, rather than a top down approach.

The teacher is the hub of the classroom. She shapes the quality and the experience of learning. And integral to the makings of a good teacher are her self-respect and the joy of teaching. The point then, is not to evaluate and monitor teachers – this is detrimental to their self-respect, which is the very basis of confidence, creativity and excellence. The point is to set in place processes that encourage and enable teachers to enhance their creative and pedagogic skills, and their commitment to teaching, such that they can derive joy from their work, and make learning a joyful experience for their students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Access to Education for All Girls:* The government must be impressed upon to spend more on education. Nothing short of *free and quality education for all* and the provision of *accessible schools* for girls in every area of the country, will ensure that all girls gain equal access to education.
2. *Retention and Quality of Girls' Education:* Government schools are increasingly becoming centres of poor quality education for the marginalised sections of society, specially girls, which in turn is connected to the high dropout rates of girls. Hence the *infrastructure and quality of teaching in government schools must be brought up to the mark.*
3. *Nationwide consultations on schools of religious denomination:* Nationwide consultations must be set up regarding the status and proliferation of schools of religious denomination, of both the majority and minority community, as the education imparted in these schools bears critically on issues of communalism and gender equality. The unregulated status of religious schools, and the nature of education they impart, have special implications for gender equality as such schools have a definite agenda that both reinforces the subordination of girls and fixes their identity solely in terms of a religious identity.
4. *Establish Gender as a Critical Marker of Transformation and as an Organising Principle:* Gender should not be a “mere add on”; it is a cross-cutting issue that requires both specific attention as well as integration into all areas of reconceptualisation. *Gender must not be introduced as yet another subject;* that will only serve to marginalise gender issues and further increase the heavy curricular burden on learners; rather, it must inform every area of education in all its stages and aspects. *Gender has to be recognised as a critical marker of transformation, and must become an important organising principle of the national and state curricular framework as well as every aspect of the actual curricula.*
5. *Establish that Gender is Not a Women's Issue – it is a People's Issue; Train Boys to Confront Themselves and Patriarchy:* Patriarchy persists because there are men and women who support it. So far men have been part of the problem – education must train them to become part of the solution. Boys must be trained to confront themselves and try to understand how they benefit from patriarchy, how they derive privilege and power and how, by not changing the system, they perpetuate gender inequality. They must be made to understand that in the ultimate analysis gender inequality doesn't benefit anyone—it only leads to mistrust, insecurity and disharmony. Education should enable boys to question their own socialisation into masculinity, and start the process of change in their personal relations, domestic life and sexuality.

6. *Critical and Pro-active approach to Equality and Empowerment of Girls:* Equality and Empowerment of girls have both been key objectives of educational policy for long, but have lacked critical edge in implementation. Hence there should be a critical shift and greater specificity in the understanding of these objectives, and all fields and stages of education must be informed by a more critical and pro-active approach as follows:

An approach to Equality that:

- Aims at a substantive equal *outcome*, not formal equal or identical treatment.
- Recognises the specific disadvantages of gendered hierarchies and subordination across class, caste, religion and the rural-urban divide, but does not accept them; instead it aims to *dismantle the disadvantages* of gender.
- Helps learners overcome these disadvantages, and *develop their capabilities to their fullest* to achieve meaningful equality

An Approach to Empowerment of Girls that:

- promotes self-recognition, a positive self-image and self-actualisation
- stimulates *critical thinking* and develops in learners, both boys and girls, the *ability to question relations of power* that are central to the hierarchies of gender
- deepens understanding of the gendered structures of power, including gender
- enables *access to resources*, specially to an expanding framework of information and knowledge
- develops the ability *to analyse the options* available, and to facilitate the possibility of *making informed choices*
- challenges relations of power and enables girls to *take control of their lives and assert their rights* as independent human

Further, education should aim to enable girls to move from individual empowerment to playing active roles

as citizens in transforming the collective life of a democracy.

7. *Integrate Input of Women's Studies Research in Textbooks, Syllabi and Training :* The NCERT, as well as the SCERTs in each state, should develop formal linkages with centres and schools of women's studies in universities, as well as with individual scholars and activists who have experience of working on gender issues in different disciplines. Joint programmes, funded by the NCERT and SCERTs, should be set up with a view to deriving inputs from research done in women's studies, and to *jointly preparing material, informed by a critical and pro-active approach to gender, for textbooks at the primary, middle and secondary levels.* Women's Studies academics and researchers should also be invited *to shape the formation of syllabi and content of different disciplines.*
8. *Integrate Input of Trained Experts on Adolescence and Sexuality:* The NCERT and SCERTs should draw upon the expertise of gender sensitive psychologists and counselors to prepare material, and design curricular practices and pedagogic strategies, that provide information and can facilitate frank and healthy discussions on adolescence and sexuality for girls as well as boys. Since adolescence is a critical formative period and sexuality is central to a person's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence, it is important to make the young aware of the diversity which exists in expressions of sexuality and gender, and come to terms with the role of sexuality in their lives; to encourage them to experience freedom from shame; to enable them to make *informed choices* that equip them to negotiate danger from those who seek to violate them; and to help them to develop the confidence to express what they see as right or wrong.

9. *In the Social Sciences (a) give importance to the reproduction of the household, the labor-force, and human and cultural resources:* Highlight the reproduction of the household and of the labor-force and human and cultural resources. Only when there is a paradigmatic shift in the frameworks of the social sciences and they expand to include not merely accounts of production but also accounts of social reproduction—of the reproduction of the household, the labor-force and human and cultural resources, will women feature adequately in the social sciences in a way that does justice to their work, their lives and the totality of their experiences. *(b) Incorporate gender dimensions of Diversity, Sexuality, Violence and Conflict:* Issues of diversity, sexuality, violence and conflict in which gender is implicated should be incorporated in all areas of the school curriculum.

10. *Language should be viewed across the Curriculum and Awareness be built in of the ways in which it Neutralises and Perpetuates Power Differences:* Curricula and syllabi planners, textbook writers along with teachers and students need to:

- understand the ways in which language naturalises power differences
- make a language of sexuality, physicality and bodies available to students, particularly girls – we have heard cases of young girl students falling ill because of their inability to articulate bodily needs, functions or dysfunctions.
- understand that inadequacies of language and the issue of silence in women’s speech and writing are not markers of biological or “natural” inability in girls and women but are signs of inadequacies and silencing in culture and education which socialise women to be passive and deferential.
- recognise that the language of literature, conventional metaphors, and ways of writing do not reflect female

lives, bodies or ways of being. The language of female subjectivity is absent in traditional male dominated literary discourse. Women’s writing that provides access to such language and perspectives must be given a prominent place in textbooks.

- recognise that because these norms and absences have been socially constructed they can also be unmade—hence the need for feminist deconstruction and reconstruction.

11. *In Science Education, highlight Gendered Dimensions of Science, Environment and Technology, as well as Scientific Dimensions of Personal and Domestic realities:* Science education should develop a focus on the gendered dimensions of science in education and in the life-worlds of learners. Aspects to include:

- Sex of male and female decided by the male sex chromosome and not by females.
- Cognisance of the fact that physical capacities are differentiated in men and women, and cannot be compared – for example men’s ability to lift heavier loads, or run faster vs. greater stamina and longevity of life in women, or a higher threshold levels for the tolerance of pain. Recognise the differential abilities of both sexes, rather than categorise one as stronger than the other.
- Problems and exercises, as well as texts that reflect the reality of women’s lives and experiences and also highlight contributions of women scientists
- Laboratory work that highlights scientific dimensions of work in the domestic sector also, for example chemistry in the kitchen.
- An understanding of women’s roles in preserving the environment and reasons for this, such as the impact of deforestation on women’s lives and their role in the Chipko movement.
- Recognition of ways in which technology can affect women’s lives. Gendered aspects of contraceptive

and reproductive technologies, female foeticide etc. need to be discussed.

12. *In Mathematics, a Focus on conscious De-mystifying and De-masculinising* is absolutely necessary:

- Particular attention needs to be paid to the language of mathematical problems which bear little relation to children's use of language in everyday life and in addition construct a gender stereotyped image of the social world, or one where women are simply absent.
- Systems to make scientific and mathematical language accessible to girls and first generation learners need to be set up.
- The contributions of women mathematicians, and processes underlying everyday mathematics done by women both within the home (like *kolam*) and outside (in the marketplace), need to be included.

13. *Open human minds to the Capacity for Rational Critique and enable them to Envision New Possibilities:* Knowledge in textbooks, and curricular and pedagogic strategies, should be geared not towards "fixing human knowledge" but to open human minds to the capacity for rational critique and enable them to envision new possibilities – only then can a transformation in gender relations be possible

14. *Introduce Participatory and Dialogical Pedagogic mode:* Pedagogy should move from a transmission mode to affirming participatory and dialogical interactions between teacher and learner. This is necessary both for recognising the needs of girls and other marginalised students who are seen as passive recipients of knowledge, and for creating a learning environment in which their voices find place.

15. *Curricular Practices to be shaped by the Life worlds of Learners in collaboration with Parents and Teachers:*

Curricular practices should be shaped by the life worlds of the girls and boys from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, in order for learning to become meaningful to them. Mechanisms and systems need to be put into place to facilitate decentralised processes of curriculum development. Involvement of different stakeholders from education- teachers, parents, local experts, researchers and activists-would facilitate the production of materials more relevant to children's lives. This is especially important given the increased efforts of the government to educate first generation learners and retain them in schools.

16. *Incorporate Conflict as a Pedagogic Strategy in the classroom:*

Given that violence pervades children's lives in the home, the school and the public world, pedagogy must address and organically incorporate conflict as a pedagogic strategy in classrooms. This is necessary for enabling children to develop critical perspectives on violence and to deal with conflict.

17. *Assessment System geared to Differential Aptitude:*

A standardised singular assessment is not desirable in the context of the differential needs and aptitudes of children. A variety of assessment strategies and multiple modes of assessment must be introduced that include the oral and the written, as well as objective, subjective, visual, narrative, abstract and concrete, arti-factual and symbolic, etc. These differential assessments should be designed to take into account the special aptitudes of different groups.

18. *Assessment Affirming a spirit of Critical Inquiry:*

Assessment should affirm flexibility of mind, a questioning attitude, and skepticism towards some textbook writer's version of "eternal truth" rather than penalise learners for this.

19. Teacher Training to be more Self-Reflective, Participatory, and Research oriented.
- Teachers' trainings, whether pre-service or in-service need to have a vision of the teacher herself as a learner engaged in inquiry and reflection. A systematic study of gender theory should be combined with an engagement with their own position in society vis a vis gender roles.
 - Research skills need to be made part of the initial input given to teachers and research grants need to be provided to teachers to encourage them to channelise their work into research material emerging from within the school to create an active situation of learning and energising the teacher
 - Substantive support mechanisms need to be developed, for teachers who are enthused to implement new ideas and pedagogies as part of their training, with the objective of nurturing initiative emerging from within the school, rather perpetuate a top down approach.
 - Mechanisms for enhancing, evaluating and monitoring the quality, regularity and impact of teacher training programmes, specially in the rural areas, must be put in place.
20. *Textbook Evaluation from the Perspective of Gender:* Content analysis of all textbooks from the gender perspective is extremely important. This analysis should include monitoring and regular evaluation of impact.
21. *Support for Research to build Perspectives on Relationship between Gender and Education:* Despite attempts over the past 50 years to integrate gender into policy and curriculum, we do not have the knowledge base to build perspectives on the relationship between gender and education in the diverse and changing context of our schooling. This should form a research focus for studies in gender, curriculum and pedagogy. Organisations like NIEPA, NCERT should provide support for research in these areas.
22. *Create Banks of Gender Sensitive Material:* The NCERT and other educational research and training institutions must build up a bank of materials produced for children and young people that raise gendered dimensions of issues addressed in the classroom, represent gendered perspectives of diverse life-worlds, and are geared towards empowering girls. This is crucial for facilitating textbook writers and teachers in transforming gender relations.

APPENDIX I

Feminist Critiques of Disciplinary Knowledge

1. History

The field of history has conventionally been associated with power—of events and people that are believed to have impacted the world—and therefore it has excluded most categories of men and almost all women since most human beings have been subjected to power, and only a few have wielded it. Conventional history has therefore marginalised most people and its gender bias has therefore been almost intrinsic. However this limited framework has over the last century been expanded to include social, economic, political and cultural processes and institutions as well as accounts of what is called history from below or people's history. Unfortunately these new developments have continued to exclude women subsuming them mechanically under men, even as the focus shifted to peasants, labourers, tribals, and dalits.

The 'add women and stir' approach has been particularly unsatisfactory in the case of women because by a mere mechanical enumeration of such and such women who 'also' on occasion wielded power (like Razia Begum, Nurjahan or Rani Lakshmbai), or took part in movements, or worked on the lands, or helped to make pots etc. only serves to consolidate the position that women did/do very little. This is partly because the sources have either reflected the biases of history in terms of emphasising the role of a few men and even fewer women or excluded the roles of women in social, economic and political life altogether.

Feminist historians have therefore argued that given the sexual division of labour, and the concurrent creation of a public/private dichotomy and the hierarchy of values attached to them, women will remain marginal in any account of history. Hence, while it is important to outline women's participation in production of food and goods which has been invisibilised as they are rarely the owners of resources and their work is subsumed under that of men, this is clearly not enough. Therefore, unless there is a paradigm shift in the framework of history and it expands to become not merely the history of production but also the history of social reproduction—of the reproduction of the household and of the labour-force and human and cultural resources more generally women will never feature adequately in history in a way that does justice to their work, their lives and the totality of their experiences.

2. Geography

Geography in India continues to remain androcentric i.e., male-centric and part of this myopic vision stems from the intellectual history of geography's evolution as a discipline not only in India, but also in the Anglo-Saxon world that had dominated the Indian geography for long. But while the Anglo-Saxon world has moved ahead in terms of developing a distinct branch of geography variously called Geography of Gender and/or Feminist Geography, Indian geography

has lagged far behind in this respect. Part of the problem is the unresolved debate about what geography is and what is not, with an emphasis on the latter rather than the former, which makes bringing women as a subject matter in geography more problematic, particularly at the school and undergraduate level. This is particularly distressing in a situation where theory and praxis have moved from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to a trans-disciplinary approach elsewhere in geography teaching and research.

The tendency in Indian geography has been to produce research of a descriptive nature facilitated by the historical tradition of empirical data gathering made possible largely because of extensive reports, gazetteers and a record keeping system of colonial origin. Moreover, physical, regional and social-cultural discourses moved independently of each other with the result that grounded realities were rarely seen as providing a backdrop for human activities to unfold. Even the seminal narrative of Spate's *Geography of India* and many more (regional) works that followed were not free from such limitations in the sense of having masterly descriptions without linking the physical and the regional with wider social and cultural processes in a mutually interactive framework. The quantitative revolution that followed in the positivistic tradition of the West was once again delinked from the understanding of processes embedded in space. Data gathered were mostly on readily quantifiable attributes perhaps because of the intellectual preconceptions of geography as an ideographic rather than a nomothetic discipline.

Even otherwise, it was the men who spoke for humanity at large despite the fact that historically women were at the forefront of transition from nomadic to settled lives. This was essentially because women were seen as confined to the private domain of hearth and home whereas the outside was associated with men. Scholars have pointed out the inadequacies of such binary and the fluidity of private and public spaces and that given the division of labour between men and women, women can experience their environment differently as compared to men. The current discussion on environment and the differential consequences of depleting natural resources on women vis-à-vis men because most of the forest-based informal activities are carried out by women for livelihoods of their families is a good example. Women's exposure to and interaction with natural and built environment may be limited also because of their limited physical and social mobility resulting in quite a different experiential world.

Many recent developmental reports in India have brought out how spatial location in which women live makes a difference even to such basic well-being as longevity, i. e. a woman in Kerala can expect to live longer by 18 years than a woman in Madhya Pradesh despite little difference in per capita incomes between the two states (Kalyani Menon-Sen and Shiva Kumar 2001; Rastogi 2003, also see Agarwal 1994). Until recently, survival chances of girls as compared to boys (sex ratios) had a distinct regional pattern of its own (Atkins et. al. 1997; Kumar et. al 1997) and yet for quite sometime geographers have been slow in recognising that the spatial implication of place may differ for women and men and there can be geography of women (Raju et. al. 1999).

For one, those who produced geographical knowledge in India were men. The latest account of Indian Geography over the decades showed this characteristic in that the National Association of Geographers, which is a body for geographers including school teachers and students did not have a woman president (Kapur 2002). Despite increasing number of women students at college and university levels, the faculty composition does not reflect the changing profiles of students (Raju and Datta 2004). Given the general environment within which the discipline of geography is located in India, it is not surprising to see what I would like to call, 'missed opportunities' in reorienting some of the androgynous learnings of the discipline. The Model Curriculum for Indian universities (mentioned above), while proposing specialisations groups and thrust areas—the latter 'need[ing] urgent attention in the coming years' talks about 'Climate and *Man*' and 'study of earth as the home of *man*' (page 27, emphasis added). However, one of the redeeming features is that in the same curriculum 'Gender Geography' is included as one of the proposed optional papers for the first time (the earlier curriculum reviews were undertaken in 1968 and 1989). Although the suggested content could be broadened and leaves much to be desired, it is the first official endorsement of arrival of gender geography on the horizon and should be welcomed as such.

Although a critical perspective on Geography of Women has yet to come, a relatively recent body of research by individuals and a small number of university departments (as well as through seminars and workshops), sporadic or small it might be in terms of overall outreach and impact, does demonstrate an intellectual growth in terms of moving from descriptive pattern identification (based on statistically segregated data by men and women) to critical analyses of processes pushing women to margins. Given this situation and also the mandatory gender inclusive understanding of development processes, it is imperative that the younger generation is systematically exposed to issues of gendered deprivation and marginalisation that have distinct spatial and regional character in India.

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3. Economics

Over the last two decades, feminist critiques of knowledge have no doubt made considerable inroads into traditional domains of the humanities and the social sciences. However among the social sciences, mainstream economics, namely neoclassical economics⁹⁶, has been the most resistant to engaging with gender as a socio-cultural construct with an impact on construction of knowledge. Although this has not restricted the successful emergence of feminist economics as an area of scholarship; unfortunately its proponents have not been able to mainstream their critiques as effectively.

Economics is particularly an important discipline to address because it remains the hegemonic discipline. Over the last half a century, it has increasingly ventured into studying areas that are the subject matter of other disciplines: economic theory of politics, economics of education, and even that of marriage and divorce among others. Not only has it strayed into other disciplines but holds considerable sway in informing the policy process. Hence it is all the more important to interrogate the basic assumptions of the discipline and **make students aware of not only the gender of economics but also understand the economics of gender** (Folbre 1994, Jacobsen 1994).

Economics is broadly defined as the science of decision-making under constraints. The neo-classical world-view it rests on three pillars (Krishnaraj 2001). These include:

- Positivism: upholds the scientific method, whereby facts speak for themselves unmediated by social reality; and the economist is the archetypical scientist “objectively” recording reality, which is in actuality the masculine subject.
- Methodological Individualism: relies on the atomised individual as the unit of social action and behaviour and these individuals with certain pre-given preferences in aggregation form a society.
- Rational-maximising behaviour: It regards humans as rational and assumes that rationality underlies all human behaviours. The central theoretical paradigm is that of rational self-interest: people act so as to maximise their own outcomes, i.e. act in self-interested ways.

⁹⁶ Three distinct theoretical frameworks are identifiable in economics: neo-classical, orthodox Marxism, and institutional economics. Among the three, it is neo-classical economics that asserts considerable power over the economic imagination of the rulers and is addressed in school textbooks. The other two schools are usually excluded from the economic textbooks.

Having established the masculinist biases implicit in the discipline, it is also important to explore how gender differences lead to different economic outcomes for the sexes. The outcomes are measured in terms of earnings, income, poverty rates, hours of work, and other standards used by economists to determine economic well-being. As opposed to the “atomised” individual, it is important to acknowledge that economic agents can be male or female, and they interact in families as well as in firms and in markets (Jacobsen 1994). Three types of economic inquiries need to be pursued in order to explore the economics of gender:

- theoretical models based on two sexes
- empirical work that addresses similarities and differences between the sexes
- analysis of economic policies that affect the sexes differently

Within the context of India, it is also important to introduce within the school curriculum the gender and development discourse to better understand and explore how gender is constitutive of the larger economic development trajectory and alternative ways of understanding development (Kabeer 1994, Sen 1987). Key areas on which school texts are usually silent and are critical in exploring gender issues include:

Women and Work: Traditional economic analysis has tended to make a large proportion of women’s work invisible because economic activity was directly or indirectly associated with the market. Income earning activities were conceptualised as work; so was agricultural family labour that produced for market oriented goods, even when labor was unremunerated. A wide range of unpaid activities – producing goods and services for the family consumption, were not economically seen as work along with domestic production and voluntary community work. A high proportion of women concentrate in these activities, the result was economic invisibility and statistical underestimation of women’s work. Further women’s activities remain undervalued as a result of viewing the market as the central criterion for defining ‘economic’.

Even when women are “economically active”, they are still working in a segmented labour market, primarily in areas defined as ‘feminine’. These also tend to be the more low-paying jobs. There have been considerable efforts to make women’s work more visible at the theoretical and empirical level. The 1991 census expanded the category of work to include subsistence activities – removed the statistical purdah that had rendered women’s work invisible. However, the debate continues with “caring work” and the care economy still remaining outside the purview of work. If children are supposed to grow up as sensitive young men and women, it is important that they are aware of issues and debates around the seeming natural sexual division of labour.

Looking at Intra-household Dynamics: Households are treated as the basic socio-economic unit of analysis and viewed as being internally undifferentiated and homogenous structures, especially by economists. The neo-classical view of the household as the proverbial “black box” treats them as undifferentiated units which are considered to be safe locations of mutually benefiting reciprocal interests with an “altruist” patriarch, a construct of New Household Economics, at the

helm of household affairs (Becker 1981). Individuals and households are discussed interchangeably as if they are one and the same unit. On one hand, the household is treated as an individual by another name as though it has interests and a logic of its own; and, on the other hand, individual behaviour is interpreted as being motivated by household interests and reflects the household needs (Folbre 1986, Wolf 1990, Kabeer 1994).

This dominant view, feminist scholars argue, is limited in its explanatory power because it fails to recognise the diversity of household arrangements, internal stratification of households along the lines of gender and age, and the location and function of households in relation to the larger economy and polity. The consensus view completely ignores the possibility of differential and competing interests in the household and the existence of iniquitous systems of intra-household resource allocations on the basis of gender, age and (often) kinship ties. The emphasis on the moral economy of the household spins a fairy tale where values of self-interest, competition, and struggle prevailing in the public sphere are left at the door and altruism, voluntarism and reciprocity take their place in the domestic realm (Wolf 1990).

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4. Sociology

Textbooks of sociology in India are usually divided into two parts dealing with theoretical and substantive themes respectively. Essential to the *theoretical section* are references to the “*Founding Fathers*” such as Durkheim, Marx and Weber. This cannot be resolved simply by adding the contributions of women sociologists, though this is important in itself. What is required is a

gendered analysis of the thinkers. Indeed resources for furthering a gendered understanding can also be drawn from them. Further the gendered assumptions underlying theoretical approaches such as Talcott Parson's structural functionalism, though almost invariably dealt with in sociology textbooks, is left unquestioned.

Within substantive sociology the focus is on structures such as caste, class, tribe, family, culture and processes such as modernisation, westernisation, sanskritisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and lately globalisation. Neither the structures nor processes are seen as gendered entities and the fact that these structures and processes mean different things to men and women are often overlooked. For example in one NCERT textbook, a chapter on population and demography is included but the adverse female sex ratio is not mentioned. Sex ratio is mentioned in a sub-section on women in a chapter on deprived groups. This mode of treating gender stems not so much from not knowing that gender is important; rather from a flawed understanding that a gender perspective implies adding women as a topic or chapter or at the most by making women visible, or by enumerating women's issues as social problems.

Visibility is very important in social sciences where women have by and large been missing. But in Indian sociology the fact that women are not treated too well in contemporary Indian society (if remarked at all) would be seen as *an aberration from the normative status and role of women* in the ideal Indian society. This has to be understood in the context of the prevailing influence of the "book view" rather than the "field view" in Indian sociology.

The distinction between the "book view", often coinciding with the Indo-logical perspective and the "field view" has been much laboured upon in the discipline. Yet, all textbooks, whether of the NCERT or the many books expressly written for competitive examinations, reflect no understanding of this distinction. Thus an image of the typical "Indian joint family" crumbling under the forces of social change but epitomising the values of Indian womanhood override all the empirical studies that sociologists themselves have conducted about the regional, caste, tribe variations in family patterns. The high status of Hindu women is eulogised with reference to *women as key symbols of purity and honour of family*, lineage and caste. It is seen as entirely unproblematic that a woman is recognised as a person when she is incorporated into her husband...only then does she become a social entity and in that state she is auspicious, a *sumangali* (auspicious woman), a *saubhagyavati* (fortunate woman). Both terms are used only for a woman whose husband is alive. A gendered understanding of the ideology of honour would for instance go a long way to make explicit in textbooks the relationships between gender, caste, and labour. The many instances of honour killings or even dowry deaths could then be explained sociologically rather than as seen as 'deviance' or 'social problems'.

The engagement between "questions of visibility" versus questions of "interrogating the cognitive structures" of the discipline is rarely explored. The subject matter of the discipline has conventionally been understood as about marriage, family and kinship, about customs and rituals where perforce it is

not easy to ignore the presence of women. Accordingly the problem never was that women were entirely absent. Indeed sociology is popularly considered a soft option and therefore more suited for women students. I therefore focus on the family in an attempt to problematise the notion of visibility.

In the study of family and kinship the relevant structures and processes of family and kinship has been seen from *the ego's (the man's) point of view*. Thus practices such as patriliney, patrilocality, *kanyadan* are presented in an apparently gender blind fashion.

Experiential aspects of family life (with which students are familiar) are completely neglected. For instance the inclusion of wedding songs sung in patrilineal societies is a good pedagogical device to illustrate the gendered nature of patriliney and patrilocality; as would be inclusion of common gendered sayings from matrilineal societies.

Since very often the North Indian, upper caste, patriarchal joint family norm is presented as “the *Indian norm*” an inclusive treatment of other kinds of family and kinship structures in different regions and across caste class hierarchies is required. I use the word “inclusive treatment” for very often treatment of ‘other customs’ is done in a fashion that renders them as the odd, exotic, less developed remnants to the dominant, homogeneous norm.

It is evident that women are visible in chapters on family and kinship but the fundamental point that the *private and the public are inter related* is usually completely missing from standard sociology textbooks. A common way of making women visible or of questioning stereotypical gender roles is to bring in stories of successful women or of showing boys doing atypical tasks like housework. It is more difficult to challenge *the cognitive structure* of sociology itself. Sociology of family and kinship is a mandatory chapter in any sociology textbook. Central to the nineteenth century social movement had been a concern with ameliorating the condition of widows. No modern history book fails to mention this. Yet widows are invisible in chapters on religion, on caste, on family, on religion, on culture. In this case even making them visible would be cognitively unsettling.

Apart from “unsettling” the question of visibility, it is important to interrogate why women are treated under “deprived groups” or “*social problems*”. This reflects the broader problem of *understanding gender as an additional topic to be covered*. Issues such as child marriage, widowhood, sati, rape, dowry and wife beating are seen as *aberrations* and not central to the structure and processes that sociology studies. A gendered sociology has to locate these as intrinsic to societal arrangements. For a gendered sociology it is imperative to *make linkages* between the micro and macro, the public and private. Gender has to be seen as an organising principle of society, and no topic, whether caste or industrialisation, religion or globalisation, tribes or media can be dealt without a gender perspective. Finally it is important that an attempt towards a gendered sociology does not lead to *gender essentialism*. If the role of social sciences is to develop *a critical awareness* engendering sociology would be a step in the right direction.

5. Political Science

The mainstream discipline of political science has remained largely focused on politics in the narrow sense – party politics and party systems, elections and electoral alliances between different groups in Indian society, transformation of institutions. Social movements are studied to some extent, particularly Dalit and women’s movements, but from the point of view of institutions and party politics – for example, the politics of the Bahujan Samaj Party, the representation of women through the 72nd and 73rd amendments, or through studies on reservations in general.

Within this framework, gender and feminist theory are invisible. Existing work on gender and politics is done by feminist scholars from other disciplines – sociology, economics, and history. Even in the sub-field of Political Theory, where one could expect an engagement with the existing rich field of feminist theorising that challenges mainstream political theorists, entire courses on Contemporary Political Theory or Western and Indian Political Thought can be taught without any feminist understanding whatever. For example, Marxist thought without any reference to socialist feminism, Rawls without any reference to Susan Moller Okin’s critique, and so on, except where individual teachers make their own intervention in the syllabus.

There have been some optional courses introduced on “Women and Politics” which have largely remained ghettos. More disturbingly, such courses can be taught with no reference to feminist scholarship at all, in a “status of women in India” mode, along the lines of government policies on “gender and empowerment.” The real challenge is to ensure a feminist perspective in mainstream courses, and to shape the form of teaching through specific sets of readings, so that whoever teaches the course, it cannot be done without reference to readings developed by interested teachers in consultation with scholars in the field.

Indeed, this last point is one that needs to be made for political science teaching since it has tended to be textbook centred. We need to develop a set of readings (chapters/sections from books, key articles) that delineate debates around the topics in the syllabus, and make these available to teachers. Further, these reading sets need to be translated into whatever the local language.

6. Science and Technology (S&T)

In recent years many countries in the world have adopted policies for greater gender equality in education. Measures have been taken to increase access to education, and to have a common curriculum in schools. However, worldwide, female enrolment in tertiary level Science and technology (S&T) is less than male enrolment and also less than in other subjects (World Education Report, 1995). The school experience plays an important role in influencing the decision of students to continue into higher education and also their choices of study.

Women have historically had a limited access to S&T and are almost excluded from intellectual, scientific and technological communities. They have always been associated with nurturance, child

rearing and house-keeping. Areas, in which women have excelled, such as, nutrition and midwifery, were never considered S&T. Further, the contribution of women to S&T is “hidden from history” as documentation is rare (Wajcman, 1995).

Historically, images of men and women and their gender roles have changed and have accordingly been justified on different grounds. These justifications have ranged from the irrational to the pseudo-scientific. Paradoxically, modern science with its professed objectivity, far from demolishing biased perceptions about women, is actually strengthening them. The organised knowledge of the ancient ages (or sciences), often viewed women as unique creatures, distinct from men. These sciences rationalised that women were incomplete men and thus inferior. The ‘science’ of craniology claimed that women were intellectually inferior because of their lighter brains. The fact that corrections for body size were ignored indicates that the processes of science are not free from bias (Gould, 1981).

Nature, the focus of the scientific study has been figuratively considered to be female and was symbolically depicted as female. Most languages use the feminine gender for abstract nouns like science and knowledge. The obverse of the Nobel medals for chemistry and physics depict both nature and science as women. However, scientists were depicted as male and with time the popular images of science became masculine (Scheibinger, 1989). The emergence of social structures of the scientific enterprise (e.g. the formation of the Royal Society) reflected as well as fed these images (Haggerty, 1995).

Language used in the scientific circles also reinforced the masculine image of science. These ideas gradually took strong roots in the social milieu. Genderised language continues even today in science, perhaps in a less offensive manner than in the past. The objective sciences (mathematics, physics) are dubbed as *hard* sciences with the implied connotation of being masculine, while the subjective branches of knowledge (sociology, psychology) are dubbed the *soft* sciences, implying that they are more relevant to women. The stereotypes they generate are self-fulfilling. Far fewer women opt for mathematics and physics than for other subjects (Jones and Wheatley 1988). The under-representation of women in S&T is often ‘explained’ by suggesting that there are biological differences in cognitive ability between men and women. Recent remarks made by Lawrence H Summers, president of Harvard University, suggesting that fewer women succeed in science and mathematics due to innate gender differences show that similar ideas exist in the highest echelons of academia (TOI, 22/1/2005).

The issue of sex differences in cognitive abilities keeps raising its head regularly and is often played up prominently by the media (TOI, 7/2/2005). Research in this area has been by and large inconclusive. The differences, if any, in ability, turn up only at ages when it is difficult to separate the effects of genetic factors from socialisation. There may or may not be biological explanations for sex differences in learning but it is obvious that social factors play an important role. From the earliest possible stage, girls and boys are treated differently by those close to them, differing

expectations are held from them and later, the mass-media constantly bombards them with messages of what it is to be male or female in the society.

The key forms of identified bias in textbooks are (i) exclusion or invisibility of girls and women from textbooks, (ii) sex- role stereotyping, (iii) subordination of girls or women to boys and men in text and pictures, and (iv) lack of female figures in history (AAUW, 1992). These biases in the curricular material relate often not only to women but also to all minority groups (Sadker. et. al., 1989). Textbook analysis continues to show the existence of these biases in Indian textbooks.

The image of S&T as male-only domains remains the dominant perception in most students' minds. Studies have shown that young children given information of generic language such as "mankind" and "he" draw pictures of men and boys when asked to visually present the information or story they had heard (Martyna 1978, in Rosser 1993). How do students view science and scientists? In a study conducted at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (Chunawala and Ladage, 1990), girls and boys drew a male scientist, who was young and worked alone, in a chemistry laboratory. They used masculine pronouns (he, his) when referring to scientists in the singular.

Not only the scientific focus and application but also the very conceptual organisation of scientific knowledge, is influenced by the social and cultural milieu of the time. Feminist theory builds on this insight and examines in detail how gender ideology permeates the social construction of knowledge (Keller, 1985). With respect to technology the perception that what women do is non-technological persists, despite their involvement in survival technologies since the dawn of history. One cause for this perception lies in the way we define technology. Even the term 'work' is often reserved for those activities that result in monetary rewards or payments. Women's work is perceived as 'domestic', and outside the purview of technology.

Various socio-cultural factors keep women from entering fields that are overtly called technology. One such factor has been the deliberate exclusion of women from certain areas of work. Craft unions have played an active role in resisting the entry of women into trades, thereby relegating women to unskilled jobs and identifying skill work with men. The gender stereotyping of jobs is remarkably ubiquitous and even very young children strongly project that there are different occupations for the different sexes. One result of such all-pervading stereotypes is that women may choose to avoid areas that are hostile to them directly and which indirectly the society is hostile to as career choices for women. This is confirmed by the low percentage of women entering fields, labelled S&T. Women account for only 9 per cent of the scientific personnel in India (Expert group meeting on training of women graduates in the development process, Thailand, 1999).

The gendering of technology occurs since technology is the product of social relations and forces. Of all the possible technologies, only some may be selected, their development paths may vary, and their effects on different social groups may be different. These choices are shaped by social arrangements and are often a reflection of the power structures in society.

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7. Mathematics

Everyone does mathematics, and yet, for many students within formal education, it remains a distant and inaccessible area of knowledge. School mathematics is given a prime place in the hierarchy of school knowledge, but it tends to get constructed as a closed system made up of rules and methods to be memorised, rigorous practice of skills and application of precise methods. This construction masks the relationship of mathematics to the organisation of power and privilege in societies.

The assumption of mathematics as a discipline exemplifying perfect rational and logical argumentation gives it an exalted status in the school curriculum of the modern nation state, which places the rational, detached, autonomous epistemic subject at its centre. This construction is premised on an understanding that mathematics constitutes the highest point of human reason, that 'logico-mathematical structures *are* the structures of rational thought' (Walkerdine, 1988, p.6). As Walkerdine (1989) elaborates,

... Ideas about reason and reasoning cannot be understood outside considerations of gender. Since the Enlightenment, if not before, the Cartesian concept of reason has been deeply embroiled in attempts to control nature. Rationality was taken as a kind of a rebirth of the thinking self,

without the intervention of the woman. The rational self was a profoundly masculine one from which woman was excluded, her powers not only inferior but also subservient. (p.27)

The historical evolution of mathematics as a discipline has thus come to define it as a masculine domain. Women and others without power in society are excluded by this definition, as lacking in the rationality required to access mathematical knowledge. In the case of women, this view acquired legitimacy through notions of women's 'innate' inferiority which originated in the 19th century and continues to circulate in contemporary times.

While mathematics appears to be value free and to report universal truths, in reality, are based on masculine values and perceptions. The construction of this 'masculinist domain' is aided by the complete lack of references in textbooks to women mathematicians, the absence of social concerns in the designing of curricula which would enable children questioning received gender ideologies and the absence of reference to women's lives in problems. A study of mathematics textbooks found that in the problem sums, not a single reference was made to women's clothing, although several problems referred to the buying of cloth, etc. (AWAG, 1988).

Classroom research also indicates a fairly systematic devaluation of girls as incapable of 'mastering' mathematics, even when they perform reasonably well at verbal as well as cognitive tasks in mathematics. It has been seen that teachers tend to address boys more than girls, which feeds into the construction of the normative mathematics learner as male. Also, when instructional decisions are in teachers' hands, their gendered constructions colour the mathematical learning strategies of girls and boys, with the latter using more invented strategies for problem-solving, which reflects greater conceptual understanding (Fennema, 2000). Studies have shown that teachers tend to attribute boys' mathematical 'success' more to ability, and girls' success more to effort (Weisbeck, 1992). Classroom discourses also give some indication of how the 'masculinising' of mathematics occurs, and the profound influence of gender ideologies in patterning notions of academic competence in school (Manjrekar, 2001). With performance in mathematics signifying school 'success', girls are clearly at the losing end.

It is important to acknowledge that mathematical competence is situated and shaped by the social situations and the activities in which learning occurs. However, school mathematics has little relation to the social worlds of children where they are engaged in mathematical activities as a part of daily life. Open-ended problems, involving multiple approaches and not solely based on arriving at a final, unitary, correct answer are absent in the way mathematics is approached in our schools. An overriding assumption of school mathematics is that an external source of validation (the teacher, textbooks, guidebooks) is always needed for mathematical claims. This approach acts to disadvantage all learners, but often acts to disadvantage girls in particular.

Is it possible to think of a gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive mathematics curriculum at the school level which goes beyond textbooks? Do we know enough about how girls learn mathematics, how they approach problems, what kinds of problems they find appealing and

challenging? Is it possible to think of a ‘less masculine’ mathematics? Feminist mathematics educators are struggling to define what a feminist approach to the study of mathematics might be. Some are examining the ways that females and males think and how they learn mathematics. Some are concerned with using women’s voices and their histories to identify important questions. Others are examining the language of mathematics to determine whether it is gendered.

After the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) the NCERT, Department of Women’s Studies published teachers’ handbooks to address gender equality through mathematics, with detailed biographies of women mathematicians. Such efforts need to be revived within an approach to gender inclusion that moves beyond quantitative representation, and brings in insights from girls’ social experiences and particularly their experiences of dealing with mathematical problems in everyday life. Folk mathematics provides a rich resource to draw on for such an approach, and needs to be incorporated in the curriculum.

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8. Language

Language is an integral component of culture. It encodes a culture’s values and preoccupations and transmits and disseminates them. It cuts across all disciplines, is basic to the construction of knowledge and has pervasive and wide-ranging implications for gender relations. Hence it is very important to examine how gender is encoded in language. Like other representations, linguistic representations too are a marker of women’s position in society. We need to question our commonsensical assumption that the sexes share “a common language”. Existing language is

patriarchal and inscribed with the inequitable power relations of society. Since language is androcentric there is a need to change it: to make it responsive to not only for women's use but for society as a whole. While gender differences are crucial in understanding how language functions differently, it is also important to remember that men and women are not homogenous groups—they are in turn defined by class, culture, ethnicity differences. Therefore it is essential that we recognise differences while rejecting stereotypes of sex difference in language use. Feminist critique of language can be mapped along several axes:

1. Feminist critiques argue that the fundamental semantic and grammatical structure of language construct male as positive and female as negative, attributing value to “male” qualities and denying them to the “feminine”. Language functions as a carrier of ideas and assumptions which are naturalised and also reinforced through everyday exchanges. They become so conventional that we miss their significance. Sexism pervades language—it penetrates its morphology (eg. word endings), affects stylistic conventions and functions through something as common and everyday as the generic use of “man” to designate all humanity. Similarly, in naming conventions women were traditionally marked either by their father's or their husband's surname—passing from one to the other. The titles Miss and Mrs. indicate women's marital status, whereas there is no such indicator in men's titles. Therefore the need to sensitise students to the way that language functions and how it entrenches ideas and naturalises power differences is pervasive. This is not just an issue of certain words being offensive. However, it is also important to highlight that because these norms have been historically constructed they can also be unmade - hence the need for feminist deconstruction and reconstruction.
2. Feminist critiques of language are also concerned with whether the world is “named” or represented from a masculinist point of view or whether they reproduce a stereotyped view of the sexes. “Names” are a culture's way of fixing what will actually count as reality. It is argued that language does not merely project something that is out there and already existing but also shapes and constitutes it as well as our attitudes towards it. Thus using language differently can actually change conditions and situations. Students should therefore be taught that language matters, not only on the superficial level of “political correctness” but on the deeper level of changing attitudes and thereby situations that obtain in the world. Using the word “black” instead of “negro” or “differently abled” instead of “disabled” or “sex worker” instead of “prostitute” is not just about greater social acceptability but about being aware of histories of oppression, segregation and moral condemnation and the will to change it.

A critical exploration of the sexist terminology in the area of human sexuality clearly illustrates how women's passivity is linguistically reinforced through the lexicon and its implications for the identity formation of boys and girls. The language used to describe intercourse whether colloquial or clinical constructs the male as active (“penetration” as opposed to “enclosure” etc.). Feminist scientists have shown how the language of biology

reinforces these stereotypes in the sphere of cell reproduction too. Also words which are “neutral” take on sexual also negative connotations when applied to women. Schulz points out how words like “professional” and “tramp” when applied to women mean “loose woman”. Also how certain words like “slag”, “slut” etc. are only feminine in application and use. Parallel instances to characterise male promiscuity do not exist or at least are rare. These words are consistently used to sexually harass girls as well as to regulate their sexuality.

Not only are the girls subject to sexual harassment, but are also denied access to the language of sexuality. Women are thought unfeminine or coarse if they write or speak sex. The need to make a language of sexuality, physicality and bodies available to our students, particularly girls is extremely important. We have heard cases of young girl students falling ill because of their inability to articulate bodily needs, functions or dysfunctions particularly in mixed classes or in mixed pedagogical situations. The language of sexuality in textbooks is caught between the awkward evasions of Moral Science texts and the clinical abstractions of biology books. None of these address the ground realities of students’ sexual lives and particularly the socio-cultural aspects of sexuality as it obtains within entrenched gender systems. In a post-AIDS world, curriculum makers are waking up to the need for Sex education. But much of this remains a strategy for crisis management which has no overall vision and does not address the specificities of students’ lives and cultural and gender issues. Even as the media and the market bombards students with a new language of apparently “free” choices, consumerism, “emancipated” and “modern” sexual norms, students struggle to forge links between what they are taught through text books and in classrooms and what they experience in their daily lives. Teachers, curriculum makers and text-book writers have to contend with this new language of the media and try and develop a criticality in students regarding these issues so that they do not get overwhelmed by the lure of the market and its promises of “freedom”.

3. The language of literature, conventional metaphors, ways of writing also do not reflect female lives, bodies or ways of being. The language of female subjectivity is absent in traditional male dominated literary discourse. This makes the subject of teaching literature texts (which are usually male authored texts, very few women authors are represented in middle or high school “rapid readers” or literary selections) in classrooms particularly challenging.

In producing textbooks for literature teaching as well as in class-room situations we need to question the liberal humanist invocation of “universal values” or “human” values which refuses to take material distinctions of class, gender, location or identity into account. This is an attitude which pervades much of our literature teaching in classrooms. Teachers struggle to explain why a poem about a bunch of daffodils that delighted Wordsworth is a “universal”, “human” document that children from say West- Midnapore who barely understand the language must relate to. However this is not to suggest that no literature other than our own or describing experiences not our own should be taught, or that “relevance” should be decided

along very narrow utilitarian lines. But perhaps the same sense of literary merit could be communicated to the student without insisting on the “universality” of the experience (which may really be quite specific and alien as far as the student is concerned) and without insisting on a complete identification on the part of the student which only confuses and distances her. This is equally true of teaching male authored discourses where the specificities of the authorial position should be made transparent so that as readers the students do not feel compelled to identify with situations patently not their own. However this is not to say that they should not be encouraged to be sympathetic to these different situations. That would defeat the very purpose of teaching literature which should ideally be a means of sensitising students to the specificities of human experiences and feelings.

We must address the issue of silence in women’s speech and writing. Women are silent because adequate words do not exist, because society censors certain forms of women’s articulation, because silence can sometimes also be subversive. Yet paradoxically women are stereotypically characterised as garrulous and gossipy. But their speech is disparaged. Also women are associated primarily with certain kinds of speech like private confessional outpourings (letter, diaries etc.), story – telling etc. Most of these genres too are not taken seriously. They are “private” forms of language, confined to the home, family or the community. Women are rarely associated with public communication like religious rituals (there are taboos on women being ordained as priests, articulating prayers or preaching publicly), political rhetoric, legal discourse, science, poetry. Female voices and concerns are absent from high culture. But they are equally excluded from sub-cultures. It is considered inappropriate for women particularly from the upper and middle classes to indulge in swearing, joking, or using slang. There is a need not only to make women’s silences heard, but also to break them by questioning taboos and dogma against women’s speech within the existing structure. Textbooks should not replicate this system of silencing and exclusion and teachers should sensitise students to be aware of them in language and culture.

4. Traditional linguists have suggested that women’s language is timorous, conservative, overly polite, trivial in subject matter given to repetitive, simple and illogical and incomplete syntax. According to Lakoff female inadequacies of language are not markers of biological or “natural” inability in women but are signs of inadequacies in culture which socialises women as timid, meek and polite and deferential (which is part of the training to be subordinate). Other linguists have shown that women use language in a different way and have seen the difference not as “inadequacy” but as a positive quality (Irigaray etc). These works have challenged the male standards of “good” or “adequate” language use. The fact that women ask more questions or use more “hedgies” (like “rather”, “somewhat”, “you know” etc.) is not a sign of their insecurity but a mark of a more inclusive and less aggressive or dominating manner of speaking. Perhaps it is crucial to reexamine the values which underlie a certain mode of speech

characterised as “male”. So while the girl child should be encouraged to be assertive in class etc., she should also be taught to question these values as the only desirable ones. She must be heard and not ignored, but she must not think that the only way of doing it is by being confrontational or undemocratic. So appropriation of male prerogatives should go hand in hand with questioning the very rules of the game.

5. Not only in the realm of the spoken language have women been silenced, the written language has also been monopolised by the powerful. Women are not the only group affected by illiteracy, but gender differences in literacy rates are striking. Where education is a scarce resource it is thought more profitable to educate boys. But besides economic compulsions there are political ones too. Powerful groups fear that education can empower the powerless and incite them to protest. In this context the divide between written and oral communication becomes crucial. In modern societies the language of permanence and authority is the written language and it is privileged over the oral. This is problematic because the oral is the means of communication most easily accessible to the powerless. Perhaps both in our text books and also in classrooms we need to be a little critical of the written word in general and learn to challenge the dogmatic authority of the book. While the students should learn to value the text, the power of the written word should not overwhelm them or deafen them to the possibilities of other forms of communication.

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