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Sensitization of Sensitive Minds

T. Sree Latha

Associate Professor of English,
Training & Placement Cell,
NRI Institute of Technology, Agiripalli,
Krishna District, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

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Abstract:

‘Sensitization’ means the process of becoming highly sensitive to specific events or situations especially emotional. It is a psychological term which explains the immoral, unethical & unfairly behavioral practice of the individual or group of individuals to other individual or group of individuals. Among many types of discriminations that influence mankind in the name of colour, caste, ethnicity, religion, language etc., the most challenging one is gender discrimination which has been inflicting severe suffering to women. Besides gender disparity, many other challenges women encounter these days are due to the fall of moral values in the respective societies. Hence there is a great need to sensitize the society on gender issues to ensure equal participation and privileges to women. Gender sensitization is a serious movement which propagates and assures awareness among the people about the need to understand the value and retain the significance of women, their needs and preferences. This transformation is possible only with the key role played by education and the influence it casts on the young minds. Ethical values, basic human feelings and exemplary personalities from the sacred texts should be included in the curriculum to bring about a sea change in the society. The properly instructed and trained young minds develop into decently dignified humans who build a new society. Hence all possible efforts should be made by the academic system to promote matured thinking and reverential practices among the children. Vera Nazarian rightly says,

“A woman is human. She is not better, wiser, stronger, more intelligent, more creative, or more responsible than a man. Likewise, she is never less. Equality is given. A woman is a human.”

Keywords: Gender sensitization, Discrimination, Ethical values, Human feelings, Curriculum.

There is no hope for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be

raised first.

..... Rabindranath Tagore

Discrimination is a very natural phenomenon that is observed in God's Creation itself. Hence it is quite common in the society as well. There are a few inequalities existing in Nature. For instance the differences in the physical capabilities of man and woman; the physical changes, pain and suffering a woman undergoes at different stages of her life, etc., are naturally predestined. Unlike men, the consequence of any kind of molestation is seriously pathetic and an intolerably obscene curse for women. Thus discrimination in society has been a natural and regular factor that is being observed since ages. There are many kinds of discriminations that are created and nurtured by man in the matters of caste, color, financial status, region, religion and gender. The paper tries to bring out the importance of sensitizing the young minds of children in order to promote understanding about the miserable conditions in which most women are leading their lives even in the advanced times.

I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality.

Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going.

..... Mahatma Gandhi

Gender discrimination is the major concern of the society today that has been inflicting lot of anguish to half of the world's population. In spite of making many laws and other reforms for the betterment of women, it is unfortunate and regretful to acknowledge that (According to recent surveys and reports) India is one of the most dangerous countries for women and the worst country for women among the G20 countries. The recent and regular gang rapes, acid attacks and other atrocities on women degraded the status of the country that it enjoyed since the Vedic period. The much brutal gang rape and murder of the paramedical student on December 16th 2012 raked up both the society and the government with renewed need for reframing laws and legislations to prevent and punish the culprits severely. It is proved by the statistics provided by National Crime Record Bureau that the crimes against women across the nation are increased by 7% across the nation (<http://ncrb.gov.in/>). These facts give India a poor picture that is in contrast to its past glory and much away from its culture of treating and worshipping women as deities. Even in the ancient period women were given due respect and high status. There were many powerful matriarchal societies then. But the scenario of the present times is so gruesome and pathetic. Such a worrisome situation poses a very big question to all of us: How did this society, with its glorious cultural past stoop to the present stage of gender inequality, gender biased and women abusive? The present scenario draws our greater concern to reinstate and restore the status of women; thereby developing the society gender sensitized.

According to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, "The power to question is the basis of all human progress." Only when a question occupies one's mind, a proper thinking starts searching for the right solution and it ultimately leads to the progress of all humans. Hence, studying the idea 'gender sensitivity,' is not preparing or presenting women against men. It is nothing but gender

awareness. Its attempt is to make all men and certain groups of women understand that both men and women are born to complement each other to lead a harmonious life enjoying equal opportunities that are prevalent on this beautiful planet. But, it is incredibly depressing and heinous to observe that gender biased termination has become much rampant in the society today. The most wicked but compelling truth is that violence against women starts from such primary stage; by a few stonehearted and nefarious women, who show readiness to abort the female infant before or after its birth. Fortunately if the girl child survives, she is mentally, physically and sexually intimidated, molested and harassed by various groups of people at various stages of her life. Moreover, women are habituated to tolerate such suffering and acknowledge it as very common and inevitable.

A woman's liberty, activities, choices and preferences are always supervised and suppressed. More surprisingly, this suppression is imposed on women of one's own family. Patriarchal society, silent suffering and agony, weak representation of women in governing bodies, and deep-rooted traditions are the deciding factors of a woman's fate. Some traditions even restrict and deny socialization of women very seriously. Deifying husband is considered the greatest sin on this Earth. Such women are treated with contempt and even as rebels by many conservative people. Another heart throbbing but well acknowledged fact mostly based on Indian context is that women have restricted rights after marriage even in their parents' house which weakens and worsens their condition further. A married girl leaves her parents' house and finds her expectant living with the new family laying all faith in them. But the painful reality shows a different scenario where she is tormented by her husband and in-laws; whom she assumes and trusts as her family. Criticizing the girl's parents, defaming them and her brought up, undermining the woman and her likes etc., happen as routine things. Above all, widows, who try to withstand the test of time, are treated with utmost indifference and contempt. They are even treated as evil omen on auspicious occasions by many conservatives including some narrow-minded women.

In such a disgraceful situation, sensitizing the sensitive young minds through gender sensitive education is a right and timely recommendation as it is beneficial to the members of both genders. It helps them to understand the reasonable grounds for valuing some postulations relating to the other gender. Gender awareness makes the budding minds intellectually comprehensive, sensitive and open. It opens up their minds to empathize with the possible alternatives of leading a quality life to the possible extent. It should be made part of the curriculum which should contain a few thought provoking and value added texts that discuss gender issues in a more pragmatic manner. Addressing such issues related to gender equality through education in classrooms is highly important as it lays a very strong impact on the sensitive minds and enables to establish better understanding and decent relations mutually. But this will happen only when the teachers and the learners are supported and permitted in adopting classroom initiatives that reflect the new dimensions based on the ideology of gender equality. Such curriculum with great potential to create the desired change addresses both the practical and

strategic needs of both boys and girls. In this regard, it is very important and crucial to appoint right teachers to act as catalysts in order to achieve the required transformation. They should proceed with an effective plan regarding the content they deliver and how they role model their own attitudes, beliefs and practices in the classroom. As a matter of fact, teachers do not come into classrooms as gender-neutral persons. They are likely to have internalized the gender ideology and other systems of patriarchal set up, by the way they were brought up. Hence much care is to be taken to prevent the influence of teachers' views on the young minds. Necessary training is recommended to the selective set of teachers if need be.

In the process of socialization of women, education and educational institutions play a pivotal role. The fundamental responsibilities, rights, and opportunities to which women are exposed in the family setup are almost formally supported and taught at the educational institutions as they are taken for granted for many generations. Hence schools are the exact places where the seed of gender sensitization has to be sown. It will directly influence the socializing process with unchallenged authenticity. The common understanding relating to gender is formed, confirmed and perpetuated by the educational institutions through textbooks, pedagogy skills and of course, by the very environment. Much research has been done on the textbooks that depict female characters as feeble, reliant, incapable and timid who are confined to domestic affairs; while their counterparts, men, are shown as muscular, sturdy, independent, gregarious and capable. Unfortunately, the genuineness of the text books is irrationally backed up and ridiculously legitimized by the teachers who teach the same in the classrooms without applying right thinking and proper logic. Thus educational institutions are blindly disseminating patriarchal system into the society irrespective of the progress women have been displaying in all fields in the modern world today.

Another bitter truth to be acknowledged is that still a large number of families in the country are not willing to send their girl child to school stating their own reasons. Some people believe that it would be enough if girls are provided with primary level of education. Their belief is that the girl anyway gets married to a man whose primary responsibility is to support and feed the family with his income. Hence they strongly support the idea that girls need not go for higher education. But, on the contrary, it is very happy to observe a good sign of promotion among a few people. Quite a good number of girls are aspiring for higher education who are being duly supported and encouraged. Some girls are even proving themselves as professionals and sharing the burden and responsibility of their families.

On the other side of the coin a large number of women are unable to continue as professionals in the fields of Medicine, Engineering, Law, Defence, Research etc. after their marriage. In most of these cases, it is the imposition of their in-laws or husbands whether to take up or continue the profession. Domestic support is not extended to them which has become an impediment in their professional growth. On these grounds most of the women professionals are confining to

domestic life thereby sacrificing their careers. Few of them are rejoining their professions and continuing – though forgoing all their incentives and hierarchical growth. Their professional growth is at the mercy of the family's decision and hence many women stay behind in climbing the professional ladder of success. It is unfortunate to recall that a part of the society still views men and women using the lens of gender, not as human beings. Moreover, they still believe in the notion that man is responsible to support the family and get exposed to the world outside; whereas a woman's role is confined to home and a few domestic affairs.

At this juncture the need to think about gender sensitization re-bounces. Education has traditionally been a rare commodity since ages for many women in terms of deciding success. It is still playing with the fortunes of many women in fulfilling their dreams and reaching their destinies. A few religions still exclude women from modern education. They exclude women from all societal activities and treat them merely as machines to continue their family lineage. Modern education, which is vital to economic independence and human emancipation, is denied to them. The power and authority enjoyed by men is largely linked to their role as bread winners of the family; unlike a few women breadwinners. Such deep-rooted patriarchal system has been forcing women to encounter serious struggle and competition with men to create a space for themselves both on personal and professional lines. Education, which is supposed to promote human thinking, on the contrary, is endorsing a preposterous function by creating chaotic and vague perceptions among the students. If a sincere and serious attempt is to be made to reduce and erase the gender gap in society, social institutions in general and educational institutions in particular have to play their due role successfully. The syllabi of the existing text books are to be thoroughly reviewed, pedagogy skills are to be honed and more importantly, the teachers' mindsets are to be tuned to suit the changing times and needs.

In the process of implementing the strategies to transform the gaps into bridges of understanding and attempting to behold the change at the earliest, it is highly essential to promote unbiased thinking among all the people and youth in particular, by updating their thought processes and mindsets. It is not a simple idea or a concept to deal with in a theoretical manner. It is a very crucial psychological concept that is to be understood, felt and experienced at intellectual levels basing on rational grounds. It has to be taught much in practice, in social interaction, and to transform one's attitudes. Such strategies should not be confined only to theory. They should also be reflected in our daily life; in the attitude of the teachers first and then among the students. For this, it is not only sufficient to include the concepts of gender equality in the curriculum; but it has to be implemented by the teachers who should prove by examples that they genuinely believe in and follow gender equality. The fact is that a majority of educational institutions that perpetuate gender-based system should encourage students to challenge the routine, resist the hegemonic plans of dominant groups and behave in a more matured way. They should understand and recognize the fact that both men and women are born equally with all fundamental essentials of a human being.

Though the role of a teacher is confined to a felicitor, they have to play a vital role in shaping the personalities of the young by setting fitting examples and references from various sources of our ancient literature, epics and myths. Along with academic mentoring at the educational institutions, if all parents play active and constructive role in promoting gender sensitization among their children from the childhood, for boys especially, there would be a lot of positive impact on their mindsets. A mother should make a boy child understand his role as a human being first. Without showing any discrimination between a boy child and a girl child, a mother should groom her boy to share all kinds of household chores regularly. Thus the daily activities would be shared by both the boy and the girl thus gaining capability in doing works inside and outside the house respectively. Thus they also develop better understanding and mutual respect for each other. Instead of imposing restrictions on girl children in every walk of their life, they should be trained to get things done outside the house. Boy children also should be taught to empathize with the situation girls have been facing. They should be taught by their mothers that anguish, pain and suffering are one and the same for both girls and boys. For sure, the more heinous and atrocious attacks on girls will come down due to the psychological mentoring at homes. Hence educating the children is not confined to educational institutions alone, it should be a continuous process at home also under the able supervision of the mother, in particular, as she is the first teacher to a child. It is highly essential to note that the role of a mother should be transformed after she gets her son married. She should play more of the role of a mentor to her son, instructing him to understand his wife more as a human being and then as a woman.

Thus it can be concluded that gender sensitization through education would be exceptionally influential and tremendously effectual. The main aim should be to break the set of patriarchal notions that are widespread in the society from time immemorial. It is high time for all women to rise up and prove to the world that both the transformation and progress of the nation are on their shoulders who should shape the children's minds in the desired manner. It can be rightly said that sensitizing the sensitive minds should begin from the initial stages of life and should continue till the end. If this process of gender sensitization is initiated at an advanced stage of life, there will be lot of struggle or rift between the two genders, thereby creating family tension and feud which will do no good to either of them. It looks like trying to convince a tiger to be a vegetarian. It will not only develop bitter relations, but also create a misconception and hostility against the noble cause. Attempt is to be made to create a gender sensitive society in spite of many impediments that might emerge in the process. Before that, we should work out strategies and methods for prevention and control of violence against women. There should be an honest and sincere propensity to support the victims and assist them lead a confident life. To achieve all these, a serious study and implementation of gender sensitization is a must along with educating the fellow beings with lot of sympathy, empathy and responsibility for the future generations. To conclude, let us observe Swami Vivekananda's thought provoking words:

*Is there any sex-distinction in the Atman (Self)? Out with the
differentiation between man and woman—all is Atman!*

..... Swami Vivekananda

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