

‘Gender’ as we usually understand is a grammatical term which classifies nouns into males and females. In recent years, the term ‘gender’ has acquired the status of a concept to describe the socio-cultural differences between man and woman. The term ‘gender’ is used in place of ‘sex’ because, while ‘sex’ refers to the binary division between males and females in terms of their chromosomes: hormones and secondary sexual characteristics etc. ‘gender’ refers to the socio cultural differences between the males and females in terms of their strength, ability, performance, wage earning capacity and social acceptability etc.

In fact the biological process does not discriminate between man and woman, but socially, women are regarded as weak, need protection and hence become subordinate to men. In every society, stereotyped gender roles i.e., what is accepted to be masculine and what is feminine, continues to have a powerful impact on the lives of people. While these stereotyped gender roles are perceived to be natural, actually they are created by the society and transmitted from generation to generation resulting in the perpetuation of discrimination

against women. The stereotyped gender roles are reinforced through the process of social learning. The boys learn to behave like boys and the girls learn to behave like girls. While their gender appropriate behaviour is encouraged and rewarded, their inappropriate behaviour is invariably discouraged, ignored and punished.

Even in the schools, though conscious efforts are being made to remove gender bias in the school curriculum and the textbooks, the content and process of school education is yet to insulate itself from the impact of gender role stereotypes being nurtured for long by the socio-cultural milieu.

Curriculum

The school plays a significant role in (a) selecting and allocating students along cognitive axis, (b) to impart universal human values such as equality, dignity, social consciousness, sensitivity and sensibility, (c) to prepare the young for participating in change processes of a society. Hence education plays a powerful role in perpetuating the gender biases, if no planned intervention is made to negate this and turn it into a vehicle of positive reinforcement of equality between sexes. The curriculum of the school consists of planned academic programmes and all other curricular activities and also what a child imbibes from the school ethos also termed as the "hidden curriculum".

The National Curricular Framework (NPE, 1986)

The National Core Curriculum, besides being undifferentiated for both sexes, emphasized core values such as equality between sexes, ending social evils and practices derogatory to women, small family norm, democracy, secularism, national integration, conservation and protection of environment, etc. The NPE and the Programme of Action (POA) highlighted the need to improve the social, nutritional and health status of the girls and also to strengthen support services such as drinking water, fodder, fuel and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as an integral component of the Universalisation of Elementary Education. The Programme of Action further, emphasized the need to revise textbooks to

remove gender bias and gender sensitize all educational personnel so that equality between sexes could be internalized through gender sensitive, gender inclusive curriculum and its transaction.