**EDUCATION A VIABLE OPTION FOR ELIMINATING SOCIETAL GENDER BIAS**

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**Abstract**

With 191.63 million students enrolled overall, 80.54 million (42%) of them are female, making India's educational system the second largest in the world after China (MHRD, 2000-01). Girls' education has advanced and gender gaps have closed as a result of the 1990s government initiatives' strong gender focus as well as the decade's pro-girl child, pro-women policies and programs. Despite growing public awareness of the lack of gender equity in academia and an increase in diversity-related initiatives, progress is slow, and disparities persist. Gender bias is a significant cause of inequality and has a detrimental effect on the careers, work-life balance, and mental health of underrepresented groups in science. The chapter will throw light on the role of education for eliminating gender biases.

***Keywords:*** *Education, Eliminating Societal Biases, Gender Biases, Gender Discrimination*

**Introduction**

*‘Education is the process of the individual mind getting to its full possible development ………it is a long school which lasts a life time.’*

*‘Zakir Hussain’*

Education has been acknowledged to assist both citizens and the development of countries. By providing equal access to education for all genders, empower individuals to challenge and dismantle gender stereotypes, promote gender equality, and create a more inclusive society. Additionally, education equips individuals with critical thinking skills and knowledge that can help them recognise and address the underlying causes of gender bias, fostering a more equitable future for all.

Educating both boys and girls leads to similar improvements in subsequent wages and enhances future chances and choices. However, educating girls generates several extra socioeconomic benefits that benefit entire civilizations. These advantages include enhanced economic productivity, better family incomes, delayed marriages, lower fertility rates, and improved baby and child health and survival rates.

Providing a high-quality, relevant education not only increases enrolment and retention, but also ensures that both boys and girls receive the full advantages of school. The predominant focus on girls' educational access may miss boys' educational requirements. This strategy also fails to address the norms and behaviours that contribute to inequality.

**Indian Education System**

The nation's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women by India, as well as its signature of the Global Fit for Children commitments, provided a framework for the government and civil society at large to take determined action. The Constitutional law of December 2002 declared free and compulsory education a basic right for all children aged 6 to 14 years, resulting in the Indian government's Education for all campaign, a national initiative to attain primary education universalization. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution gives women the right to equality, and Article 15 (1) expressly outlaws discrimination based on sexual orientation, and Article 15 (3) provides for acts that harm women by authorizing the state to make specific arrangements for them. Article 16 of the Constitution guarantees equal opportunity for all in areas pertaining to public employment or nomination to any office, and expressly outlaws’ discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In terms of gender inequality, India's Gender Inequality Index (GII) rating in 2021 is 0.490, ranking 122. This score is higher than the South Asian region's (0.508) and close to the global average of 0.465. This reflects the government's initiatives and investments in policies that promote more inclusive growth, social security, and gender-sensitive development.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) rating for India declined from 0.493 in 2020 to 0.490 in 2021. It was 0.711 in 1991.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2022 measures the growth of gender-based gaps in economic participation and access to opportunities, educational achievements, health and survival, and political empowerment in 146 countries (World Economic Forum, 2022). Although the Index measures gender parity rather than substantive equality, it is a valuable tool for examining development and regression.

The 2022 Report discovered that the average distance completed to parity was 68%, based on ratings ranging from zero to one hundred. According to the World Economic Forum, in 2022, on the current scenario, they predict that the closing of the gender gap will take 132 years and achieving equal economic participation and opportunity will take 151 years.

In addition, the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report for 2022 puts India 135th out of 146 nations in terms of gender parity. Parity is attained when the same proportion of boys and girls—relative to their respective age groups—enter the education system, achieve educational goals, and advance through the different cycles (UNESCO 2003).

Whether the focus is on secondary or elementary education, guaranteeing access and offering a good quality education is critical if societies are to fulfil their development goals. Developing nations that fail to offer equitable access to basic education pay a substantial price for doing so. The development consequences of failing to achieve gender parity in education will be reflected in lower economic growth and increases in fertility, child mortality, hunger, and poverty.

**Gender Roles**

Many research find out the distinctions between boys and girls in home, on the street, in the school, and on the playground. For example, boys are often active, playful, confident, brash, aggressive, and tough to regulate. Girls are more passive, kind, calm, tolerant, complacent, and easily controlled. It is critical for individuals working in education to understand how infants and toddlers learn to perceive themselves as girls and boys in their cultures' adult representations of women and men. There are some general conceptions of gender roles.

1. Men's and women's social roles, as cultural artefacts, fluctuate over geography and time.
2. There are no disparities between girls and boys, but these distinctions appear to be natural and inherent in both sexes. Researchers infer that they are biological and hence unchangeable.
3. These disparities are the product of the ages of social experiences of the two sexes - they are socially formed and determined, and hence changeable.
4. Modern human civilization needs and generates new opportunities for the social roles of the sexes to be complementary and equal on a global scale. There is no question that women have shown to be equally capable in all disciplines.

**Gender Equality in Education**

It is essential to address the issue that, despite India's explicit policy on gender-neutral educational programme, prejudices and preconceptions infiltrate into learning materials and people who handle them. One should point out the problems that teachers and administrators must address in order to eliminate sex prejudices in an effort to promote gender equality and positive self-concept through education and a life skills approach. Everyone should be taught in school that biological sex and social gender are distinct ideas in terms of development.

**National Policy on Education (NPE)**

The NPE emphasises key ideals like as gender equality, the abolition of societal problems and practises that are degrading to women, the small family norm, and so on. The NPE and PoA emphasise the importance of improving girls' social, nutritional, and health status, as well as strengthening support services such as drinking water, food, and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a vital element of Universal Elementary Education (UEE).

There is a significant disparity between India's laws and regulations, as well as its strong educational practices interwoven within structures and organizations. Gender norms and obsolete traditions frequently bind girls and women, exposing gender inequities. Approximately twice as many girls as boys are expelled or never sent to school, particularly if they belong to a social and economic group that looks down on them. Many girls who drop out of school at the age of ten or eleven see their future as working in fields or on road construction projects and earning a living. Another barrier to females' education is a lack of sanitation in schools across the country. There are no separate restroom facilities for girls in many schools. When girls hit adolescence, they require separate restroom facilities. Many females drop out of school because they lack the privacy and facilities they require to deal with the menstrual period. In India, 23% of females drop out of school when they reach puberty. In addition, girls who continue their education may miss up to 50 school days each year due to menstruation.

Education should be utilised as a catalyst for fundamental improvements in women's position. Education, as a human right, must contain non-discrimination, equality, and justice values. It cannot be offered as a commodity to those who can afford it. It should be considered a right that the government guarantees. It should be seen as the turning point in women's empowerment, leading to national development through empowering women to respond to problems in order to safeguard the better lives of themselves and their children. These facts are inextricably linked to the development and execution of educational policy. As a result, in the absence of constructive, intentional, and progressive legislative reforms that are clear and consistent, and can successfully deal with these issues, the Millennium Development Goal will always remain a sham. It is critical that people of society understand the value of education.

**Conclusion**

The education system can undoubtedly play an important role in eradicating gender inequity. It is critical to raise awareness of the benefits of gender equality. It is vital to remember that the necessity of achieving the constitutional aim of creating an equitable society is significantly impacted by the inclusion of the notion of gender equality in the curriculum and the passage of laws to eradicate gender inequality.

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