

## Gender Friendly Approach in Curriculum Transaction: Some Issues and Guidelines in Arunachal Pradesh.

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### **Abstract**

*Education of the girl child, especially of the tribal girls in our country has been a major challenge so far. The reasons for the relative educational deprivation of the girls may, depend upon different situations. In a tribal society where gender role, stereotypes are perceived to be natural and are perpetuated from generation to generation; amount of incentives to the girls in the form of free tuition, free textbooks, free school uniforms and free hostel facility etc. is considered to be adequate enough for increasing their participation but, in such situations, a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction on the part of a teacher is an important means for giving equal treatment to both the boys and girls at every level of curriculum transaction in the school. This paper aims at sensitising the primary level teachers about the need and importance of a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction in both scholastic and co-scholastic areas of school education in the tribal socio-cultural context of Arunachal Pradesh.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Development occurs when both men and women are able to achieve what makes their lives more valuable. 'Development is much about enhancing the capability of people than meeting their material needs' (*Amartya Sen*). Human life basically sustains and develops through the contributory roles of both men and women and through the enhancement of their respective

capabilities. In a society like ours, however, a girl child is perceived to be less capable than a boy and hence discriminated everywhere, in the family, in the community and even in the school. Gender based discrimination is a special feature of socialisation in our country. The parents, community members, peers and even the teachers reinforce the same every time everywhere, leading to an imbalanced

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development of the society. 'The missing of social opportunities on account of 'gender' is a blatant reality of our times which affects our well being and the pace of development' (*Amartya Sen*).

The gender situation in a predominantly tribal inhabited state like Arunachal Pradesh, is in no way different from that of other parts of the country. The practice of gender based discriminations in the state deprives the tribal girls in numerous ways ultimately putting them at an unequal footing vis-a-vis their male counterparts.

Education plays a key role in changing the restrictive attitude of the people in the society with respect to the practice of stereotyped gender role and thereby enhancing the capability of the girl children. Therefore, there has been a strong need to introduce suitable educational interventions so as to eliminate all types of gender biases and gender role stereotypes at the primary level by providing a gender neutral school and classroom environment and a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction from the very beginning.

Notwithstanding the importance of gender inclusive education, in terms of providing equal chances and choices to both the boys and girls in the tribal socio-cultural context of Arunachal Pradesh; in this article, an effort has been made to sensitise the primary school teachers about the need and importance of gender friendly approach

in curriculum transaction in both scholastic and co-scholastic areas of school education.

## **2. THE GENDER ISSUE**

'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.

### **3. GENDER SITUATION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

The gender situation in Arunachal Pradesh is no way different from that of other parts of the country. The common perception is that, tribal societies do not have gender discrimination, is far from being the reality. Lack of property rights on the part of women and lack of their participation in the decision taking process, prevalence of the system of bridal price and polygamy in some parts of the state reduce the status of women to that of commodities in the society. The tribal girls in the state suffer from the cumulative disadvantage of belonging to the backward communities as well as being females in a social setup where gender based discriminations are wide spread and visible. Girls in most cases are engaged in the household work, entrusted with the responsibility of fetching firewood and water, cooking meals and looking after their siblings. They are also compelled to marry at an

young age. Most of these girls who enter into the portals of primary education have a low self-esteem and negative self-image. In the absence of a gender friendly school curriculum and gender sensitive approach in curriculum transaction, the teachers fail to motivate and create interest in them leading to large scale dropouts of these girls before completing their elementary education.

### **4. EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES TO GENDER ISSUES**

In Arunachal Pradesh, to address the gender issues, the Government has been providing a number of incentives to the tribal girls such as free education, free textbooks, free uniform and free hostel facility etc. for a long time. In recent times, a few notable educational initiatives such as appointing lady teachers, opening of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalays (KGBVs) and awarding scholarships to the meritorious tribal girl students; have also been undertaken by the Government. However, mere provision of a few attractive incentives and separate allocation of resources for these tribal girls, in themselves, are not adequate enough in increasing their participation, motivating them to study and increasing their achievement levels. Gender issue is not an educational issue alone. It is a social issue and more importantly a developmental issue; therefore, there is an imperative need for gender sensitisation of the teachers, teacher educators, parents, community members and mahila

mandals etc. about various gender equality and equity related issues and concerns so as to create an enabling environment in the society for these tribal girls to open up, participate and gradually build up their self image and collective strength.

### **5. GENDER FRIENDLY APPROACH IN CURRICULUM TRANSACTION, WHY?**

The prevailing social context, the traditional mindset of teachers the type of textbooks in use and the type of classroom interactions are some of the factors mainly responsible in perpetuating a gender biased environment in the school. In a society, where gender based discriminations are considered to be normal, in a school, where in most cases, classes are run by one or two male teachers with the help of a few elder boys, the boys are always given an upper hand in all the school activities. They are considered to be physically and mentally strong and active and are capable of doing things whereas, the girls are considered to be weak, submissive and are less capable. As a result the girls are usually given activities which are related to the domestic chores such as cleaning, sweeping, dusting and decorating etc. whereas boys are given important outside responsibilities. While games and sports are considered to be the main domain for boys, cultural activities like songs and dance are considered to be meant for girls.

Similarly, the textbooks which are one of the major means of curriculum transaction at the primary level, sometimes are found to be gender-biased in terms of content, characters and illustrations etc. There is predominance of male characters and portrayal of men in lead roles than women. While men are shown as doctors, engineers and leaders etc. women are usually portrayed as housewives, mothers and agricultural labourers conveying the message that men are stronger and more capable while women are less capable, weak and hence dependent. In recent years however, efforts have been made to remove all forms of gender bias from the text books and accordingly the text books have been revised in almost all the states.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the State Government has been following the NCERT curriculum and syllabi for all stages of school education, however, the textbooks at the elementary level (class I - class VIII), as prescribed by the 'State Government and supplied by the private publishers in recent years, need to be analysed to know whether they are free from gender bias or not.

In a classroom situation, as it is observed, the boys, more often, lead in doing a task than the girls. They are more vocal and interact more freely and frequently than the girls. The girls being reclusive by nature, mostly hesitate to speak. As a result, a teacher naturally tends to pay more attention to the boys than to girls. Similarly,

sometimes a teacher uses the stereotype language unconsciously in the classroom such as; 'Why are you crying like a girl?' or 'How can a girl behave like this?' etc.

In such situations therefore, a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction on the part of a teacher is the only means available for giving equal treatment to the boys and girls at every level of curriculum transaction in both scholastic and co-scholastic areas. Gender friendly approach is a conscious and sustained effort on the part of a teacher to develop the capabilities of every individual to its fullest extent by removing gender stereotyping. A teacher by involving the girls equally in various classroom activities can bring about desirable changes in classroom interaction. On the basis of his/her ingenuity and initiative, a teacher can undo the damage done by giving the message, that the girls are as capable as the boys and that gender does not affect performance.

## **6. SOME GUIDELINES FOR A GENDER FRIENDLY APPROACH IN CURRICULUM TRANSACTION**

A teacher in a classroom situation, needs to follow some guidelines as given here in order to practice a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction.

### **6.1. Dos**

- First of all the teacher needs to be gender sensitised and develop appropriate skills to break the gender stereotypes in the teaching-

learning process by attending specific training programmes.

- He/she has to be fully convinced about the dire need for a gender friendly approach in curriculum transaction for developing a positive self image of the girl students.
- He/She has to understand the social context and create an enabling environment in the community as well by gender sensitising other members of the school, parents and community members etc. through special advocacy programmes or through regular PTA meetings.
- He/She has to create a motivating classroom environment by decorating the classroom walls with the photographs/portraits of both men and women in higher capacities and roles. In this regard, the photographs/portraits of local women in higher position should be used to have better impact.
- He/She has to constantly strengthen his/her own knowledge based on different aspects of gender discriminations prevailing in the local situation and accordingly adopt innovative gender friendly approaches and strategies.

### **6.2. Don'ts**

- Do not preach on issues related to gender and social equity as preaching is always counter productive.
- Do not follow any gender-discriminatory practices in the

classroom. Take care that both boys and girls are given similar type of tasks in similar situations.

- Do not make single sex groups for conduction group activites.
- Do not use remarks that are derogatory to girls and boys.
- Do not be over protective or partial towards girls openly as it creates resentment among boys.

### **6.3. Guidelines in scholastic areas**

In textbooks, if instances of gender bias are present in the thematic as well as linguistic content of the subject which is being taught, such prejudices should be set right as per the situation before presentation.

- Illustrations and pictures which ignore women characters relevant to the content, need to be supplemented by women's representation in order to make them gender inclusive.
- While transacting subjects like Mathematics, Environmental studies and languages etc. emphasis should be laid on examples that include both men and women from different walks of life.
- In the teaching - learning process, conscious efforts needs to be made by the teachers to give equal opportunities to both boys and girls to speak freely and frequently.
- In addition to the traditional method of teaching, a teacher can adopt some non-conventional

methods of teaching such as value clarification, Role play and other participatory method to integrate gender sensitisation content in a more meaningful manner.

- While giving career guidance to students, a teacher can provide instances of strong career image for girls so as to enable them to feel to choose a career of their choice.

### **6.4. Guidelines in coscholastic areas**

Gender friendly approach is considered to be very effective while conducting activites in coscholastic areas.

- In Work Education activities, for example - both boys and girls may be assigned cleaning, sweeping and beautification activities on the basis of their roll numbers. During important functions of the school, both boys and girls should be given equal opportunities in offering garlands/bouquet, tea and snacks etc. to the guests.

In physical and Health Education, girls may be encouraged to play tough games like football, Volley ball and basketball etc. Both boys and girls may be asked to command the morning assembly and Physical Training classes turn wise and both should also be asked to participate in Yoga practice.

- In Art Education classes, girls may be encouraged to learn and play musical instruments and the boys may be encouraged to participate, in group dances. The rural tribal

girls who generally hesitate to participate in creative writing and expression, may be motivated in a

sustained manner to participate in speech competitions, Poem recitation and Quiz competition etc.

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