

Revisiting Gender Equality in Schools: From policy to Action

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***Abstract-** Gender equality refers to the condition in which people of all genders have equal access to resources and opportunities. It is time to see gender equality more than in terms of the binary of male and female. Gender equality means not only being fair to men and women, but also to LGBTQ people and people of other genders. Gender equality is something that has been in demand for so long, but it still hasn't reached the basic minimum. It is critical to recognise that reserving seats for females in buses/metro, chanting slogans like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," the United Nations declaring gender equality a fundamental human right, and the Supreme Court of India decriminalising Section 377 are insufficient to end the persistence of gender inequality in our society.*

This paper analyses how gender inequality affects all genders. Of course, gender inequality suppresses females and other genders more, but it also creates barriers for male members of society to grow as humans. This paper discusses the different premises of gender equality and its challenges. And it majorly focuses on the premise of schooling and the school curriculum and tries to analyse the challenges posed by it to gender equality. As the school environment shapes one's behaviour and mindset, it is important to relook the school curriculum and gender dynamics in schooling processes. With the help of a study of 15 C.B.S.E schools in Madhepura, district of Bihar, this paper examines the issue at grassroot level and has shown how small administrative change can lead to big threats to gender equality.

The objective of this paper is to understand the challenges in determining gender equality and how schooling processes and school curriculum play a major role in shaping the concept of gender. The paper also tries to explain how it's time to redefine the concept of gender equality and make it more inclusive by including other genders too. Gender inequality does not take place only in fixed premises; rather, it is evident everywhere, but to understand and analyse it better, this paper has taken the premise of school.

Methods and procedures used in this paper is observation as well as digital and personal interviews of different school students and teachers.

Keywords: Curriculum, Opportunities, Redefining, Discrimination, Equality

Introduction

“The state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”.

Art 45, Part IV, Directive Principles of State Policy,
The Constitution of India, 1951

Gender equality is the talk of the town. No matter where one lives, one must have come across this notion. It is relevant to note that "gender equality" is usually seen in binary terms. But in its substantive sense, it means equality of all genders. As our world is evolving, we have seen that nowadays there is acceptance of other genders too, but still there is a long way to go.

School is an important part of one's life. As school is the place that determines our personalities and helps us realise our potential as humans, we feel nostalgic about our school days, and most of us believe those were the golden days. But for some, the same school is the memory of facing discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion and how it led to the derogation of one's potential. Leach and Humphreys (2007) has highlighted the gendered dimension of violence in school. Recent awareness that schools can be violent environments has tended to overlook the fact that many such acts have their roots in antagonistic and unequal gender relations, which are accepted and "normalised" by regular school structures and procedures. The school environment affects children, and the schooling process has a life-long impact. So, it becomes important to see how school and the schooling process affect gender equality and how it moulds one's personality and behaviour.

Kane (1995) examines opposing arguments regarding how education affects intergroup relations in general and how it shapes gender ideology in particular. Data from author show that acceptance of group-based remedies for gender disparity tends to be less positively impacted by education than recognition of that inequality. This pattern supports the claim that education perpetuates social inequality rather than addressing it. It's crucial to realise that some views on gender inequality have a stronger correlation with education than others. Education affects gender-related attitudes that are more critical or egalitarian in all of these areas, including beliefs about the reasons for gender stratification, opinions about the power of men and women, and challenges associated with playing different roles.

In most schools, there is a bifurcation between male and female students. Based on this bifurcation, everything is being decided. This bifurcation decides the dresses, sitting arrangements in classes, separate queues in assembly, separate buses, even hairstyles and choices of subjects too. Such bifurcation makes an individual believe that one is supposed to fit into either of the two. And if a person does not find themselves fitting into any one of them, then it leads to self-doubt, confusion, depression, anxiety, and what not. Robinson and Espelage (2011)

assert that it is critical to comprehend how victimisation in schools and through technology may affect scholastic and psychological experience based on school-based research with LGBTQ children. Lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) kids experience bullying and homophobic victimisation more frequently than pupils who identify as straight in American schools.

Objectives

The purpose of this essay is to clarify the subject of gender inequality in the classroom and to redefine the phrase "gender equality." The objective is to examine the idea of "gender equality" holistically, which goes beyond the simple dichotomy between men and women. The goal of the essay is to examine policies, their application in the context of education and schooling processes, and the effects of these processes on gender.

Hypothesis

The way that schools are set up encourages people to think of gender in terms of male and female. Curriculum, language, and management all have an impact on how children think, and they are forced to accept those ideas. In language, sexism elevates one gender while demeaning the other. Furthermore, the gendered education gap is still present long after legislation for gender equality have been implemented.

Gender inequality mostly refers to the plight of women and girls. Other genders are completely ignored in schools and educational settings. The discussion of gender inequality is therefore restricted to women's suffering because other genders are not even given space in the curriculum. Due to diverse norms, behaviours, and institutional procedures, girls' children are still having to deal with the issue of gender inequality. Girls in schools frequently deal with difficulties including victimisation, sexual assault, and character assassination.

Boyhood and adolescence are negatively impacted by gender disparity. They are compelled to behave in a particular way and uphold the manly ideal because of it. Those who do not follow suit risk being victimised and bullied by their friends.

Methods and Procedures

My goal is to map the many diverse ways that the topic of revisiting gender equality has been tackled by many disciplines. In addition to using digital and in-person interviews with various high school students, teachers, and college students, this article uses observation as one of its methods and procedures. For this work, data from 15 schools were contacted and examined. Twelve of the fifteen schools were co-ed, two were girls' schools, and one was a boys' school. Interviews with school employees, vice principals, school principals, and students were conducted to better comprehend the idea of gender equality.

In order to learn more about their perspectives and analyse the gender mindset that has been shaped by the educational system, college-bound students were also questioned.

Results and Discussion

Where are the other genders?

After reading the research and analysing the problem at the grassroots level with the aid of several interviews and observations, it is incredibly clear to me how and why gender disparities still exist. All 15 of the schools examined in this study were CBSE institutions, and none of them included a "other gender" column on the admissions form. Infrastructure-wise, they once again lack restrooms for people of different genders. There are only bathrooms for men and women there. In other words, these institutions do not even take the possibility of alternative genders into account.

School Name	Other Gender Column in Admission Form	Availability of Washroom for other Genders	Any student studying who belongs to other Gender	Any forum for gender sensitisation
<i>South Point Public School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Holy Cross School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Jitendra Public School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Kiran Public School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>S.N.P.M. Higher Sec. School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Tulsi Public School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Deigratia International School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Holy Cross Girls School</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗
<i>Central Vidya Mandir</i>	✗	✗	✗	✗

<i>Sark International School</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>R.R. Greenfied International School</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Radiant Public School</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Bright Angel's School</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>St. Williams Residential School</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Central Vidya Mandir</i>	x	x	x	x

Table: Based on survey conducted by the author in the Madhepura District of Bihar state.

Dresses, hairstyles, and the classroom are specifically created and divided into male and female sections. How many genders are you aware of when it comes to inquiries about gender during an interview? Out of 170 pupils, 109 said two, meaning a guy and a girl. All of those students are in grades 5 through 10. It demonstrates how the educational system and schools influence children's mindsets and lead them to believe there are only two genders. Infrastructure shortages lead people to believe that there are only two genders naturally.

Total Number of students interviewed	Belief in existence of only two genders (Male/Female)	Belief in possibility of more than two genders	Don't know the exact answer
170 Students (90 Boys+ 80 Girls)	109 Students (58 Boys+ 51 Girls)	13 Students (Studying in 10 th class) 8 Girls + 5 Boys	48 Students (Most of them are students of 5 th to 7 th class) 30 Boys + 18 Girls

Table: Based on interview conducted by the author in 15 Schools of Madhepura district of Bihar.

In terms of curriculum, the majority of novels included only boys and girls; none of them featured any other gender. Children that do not fit into this binary are made outcasts as a result of these things. Teenagers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) are more likely than kids who identify as straight to have suicidal thoughts, attempt suicide, be victimised by peers, and have greater rates of unexcused absences from school (Robinson and Espelage, 2011).

Novels	Protagonist	Any character of other gender
The Invisible Man by H.G. Wells	Male	No
The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne frank	Female	No
Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift	Male	No
The Story of my Life by Hellen Keller	Female	No
Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K Jerome	Males	No

Table: Based on curriculum which is in practise in schools.

Curriculum, School Management and Girls

Aikman, Unterhalter, and Challender (2005) has makes the case that in order to obtain high-quality results for girls' education, there is a need for gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogies in schools. The majority of them responded affirmatively when asked if they felt there was any bias in the curriculum while questioning schoolgirl students. They explained that boys are typically portrayed as powerful and capable leaders, and that male protagonists make up the majority of book leads. Even the school administration gets involved in the selection of games and academics. Girls have revealed that while guys are playing outside games, girls are not permitted to join them. They are requested to only play indoor games on a regular basis, while they are infrequently permitted to do so.

Girls are the kids in schools who experience more daily discrimination. Out of the 15 schools considered for this assignment, 11 of them provide senior classes with separate sections for boys and girls in grades 6 through 12. Speaking aloud in the hallway and ground is not permitted for boys and girls. If caught, the girl kid is typically held responsible. Interviewees agreed that girls are victimised and subject to character assassination in such situations. Interviews have also revealed that females are expected to wear their hair in a specific way, most commonly in a ponytail, and are not permitted to open their hair or use coloured clips.

Due to a lack of resources and infrastructure, girl children also experience issues. For instance, out of the 15 schools considered for this paper, 12 do not have access to sanitary pads. 'Although it is important to understand that it is not possible to fulfil academic potential until or unless there is the availability of a school environment that is non-discriminatory in its physical design' (Sommer, 2010).

Schooling process and boys

When discussing gender equality, boys are assumed to be capable. It is presumed that this part possesses privilege, and in some cases, that assumption is undoubtedly accurate. However, boys experience problems in the classroom and feel excluded. A grade 5 boy pupil who was being interviewed claimed very innocently that he does not weep in front of his buddies because they tease him. He claimed he wouldn't weep since guys aren't meant to cry because sobbing is a trait of little girls. This is merely an illustration of how guys are introduced to our culture. Despite the fact that the curriculum makes the same assumption, male characters are typically assigned the lead roles in novels. All people who act differently than is expected of them are taunted and bullied by their peers.

Getting rid of sexist language is an important first step in eliminating sexism in society, according to Kalia (1986). It is based on an examination of 41 textbooks used in Indian schools. Kalia came to the conclusion that 75% of dominant figures and the majority of characters in textbooks are men using computer-aided content analysis. Men were assigned significant roles in Indian textbooks. Additionally, women held non-stellar roles. Kalia has provided a prescriptive study of the language used in Indian textbooks (Kalia, 1986).

As was previously mentioned, permitting only males to participate in outdoor activities and forbidding girl children foster the idea that girls belong inside, while boys belong outside. Such division causes pressure on the boy child, and as a result, the schooling process causes them to become detached from certain feelings and values.

Way Forward

I believe that the best way to address the issue of gender disparity is to first review and broaden the definition of gender equality. In addition, sexist terminology must be eliminated, the curriculum revised, and room made for both genders in the curriculum. Girls' and boys' sections should no longer be segregated, and coed schools should serve as a venue to advance gender equality. Kalia (1986) has considered sexism as a disease and sexist language as a critical symptom. Sexist language prevents one gender from engaging in activities that the other gender is permitted to do in the same society. Kalia has pointed out that a sexist language is nothing but a male-centred language. Although there is a female-centred language also, it seems like Indian textbooks have given preference to the male-centred language. In the world of high achievers, women are essentially excluded. In Indian textbooks, "mankind" refers to humanity, whereas "womankind" does not. It is necessary to understand that token attempts to include women will not do much. Such attempts lead to greater insults and more confusion (Kalia, 1986).

Infrastructure must be built to accommodate all genders, but before that can happen, society's thinking must be changed to recognise that gender is a term that encompasses many other genders and is not a binary concept. Sommer (2010) claimed that for adolescent girls who must manage their monthly menstrual hygiene needs in school environments that frequently lack adequate latrines (or any latrines), a sufficient supply of easily accessible and clean water, and a

mechanism for disposing of used sanitary products, basic water and sanitation-related facilities are still lacking in low-income countries.

In order for pupils to reach their maximum potential, they should also be allowed to choose their own games and courses. Since school is where a person can reach their maximum potential, it should aid rather than hinder.

Conclusion

The topic of gender disparity has long been widely discussed. The issue still exists despite the numerous regulatory initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and education programmes that have been carried out globally. It became clear to me while writing this essay that the issue is how gender equality is defined. Because it is frequently viewed in binary terms, that issue is the sole one for which policies are formed. Other genders are already excluded when defining the term and formulating policies, and even when those policies are drafted, putting them into practise is still difficult.

In this essay, the definition of gender inequality is discussed in relation to schools and the educational process. With the aid of 15 schools in the Madhepura area of Bihar, I made an effort to analyse how gender conceptions develop in our minds and how school plays a significant role in them. And I think there is still a lot to be done in this situation, so there is a long way to go.

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