

## SCHOOL AND GENDER SOCIALISATION: GENDER AWARENESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PONDICHERRY

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**Abstract:** The main focus of the study is to analyze the attitude of Primary school teachers on gender role differentiation and their related role and behavior. Teachers are the key agents in the gender socialization that occurs in schools. Teachers not only educate, but also transmit the values, norms and traditions shared in the society. Studies revealed that attitudes of teachers affect the expectations they have of their students and these expectations have a dramatic impact on their students. This study focused on the following problem statement: What are the attitude of teachers about (a) gender roles (b) the role of the teacher in relation to gender roles and (c) specific educational practices in the classroom.

Attitude and perceptions of teacher's behavior regarding gender roles were investigated. Case Studies are included for the subjective nature of the subject by conducting in depth interview with the primary school teachers. The findings of this study emphasize the necessities of gender sensitization to teachers and their relation to the students. It also emphasizes gender inclusiveness in educational practices, both in its content and process.

**Introduction:** It is believed that once girls are given access to school, women would enter the public sphere, empowerment will follow automatically. Their life options will expand and they will be in a position to take greater control of their lives. But the difficulty lies in the facts that schools themselves create boundaries that limit the possibilities. The content, language, images in texts, the curriculum, and the perceptions of teachers have the power to strengthen the hold of patriarchy. The school becomes the enclosed space like domestic sphere where discrimination and violations are not spoken or questioned. Socialization and education reinforce each other. Schooling becomes another form of domestication. Teachers' attitudes highly influence the lives of students of the future generation. But the teachers are unaware or biased on gender issues. So it is necessary to analyse the gender awareness of primary school teachers.

**Gender Socialisation:** Ann Oakley (1972) was one of the first sociologists to extend ideas about socialization to understand how gender is learned and new femininity and masculinity are socially constructed. Oakley used the term 'gender' in the early 1970's to distinguish biological 'sex' from 'gender'. Oakley adapted the term to refer the social stratification of 'masculine' and 'feminine'<sup>1</sup>.

In our society men and women socialise differently. Society expects different roles from boy and girl child. From the early years of childhood, they are taught to behave according to their gender through various, opportunities, encouragement, suggestions and guidance. They learn what females and males are supposed to be like and what they are supposed to do as a result of gender stereotypes. Society assigns different abilities and characters on the basis of gender. In most societies men are identified as

responsible, aggressive, strong, independent, and self-confident where as women are passive, dependent, emotional, nurturing and warm. Society's definition of the male role as emphasizes mastery and competence, where as the female role is defined as submissive and dependent. Therefore, people raise their children according to gender role that set up by the society.

Family, school, media, religion are the important agents of socialisation which uphold the patriarchal values and ideology. These agents are important for socializing the next generation on patriarchal values. The boys learn to be dominating and aggressive and girls learn to be caring, loving, and submissive. These stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are internalized by both men and women. Both men and women have the pressure from the society. The men are supposed to earn and look after the family, while women are supposed to do the domestic work in the home.

It is because of these gender stereotypes that women are more vulnerable to violence and other kinds of cruelty like sexual harassment, sexual abuse, female infanticide, female feticide, dowry murder, and domestic violence. In the society, a continued sense of insecurity keeps women confined home, women economically exploited, socially suppressed and politically passive.

**Gender Socialization at School:** As a microcosm of a larger society school reinforce cultural norms and values that include gender role expectations and sexist behaviours. "Schooling has historically emphasized gender difference, with girls often disadvantaged because of the gendering of subjects, lack of role models, sexist resources, and the way that classroom interaction operated to favour boys"<sup>2</sup>. Education was seen either as a threat to, or

preparation for, their duties as wives and mothers. Women do reach similar levels of education to men, the kind of education they had is quite different. Dale Spender (1982) argued that “classroom interaction made girls invisible, with teachers both encouraging and yet devaluing ‘feminine’ behaviours in girls”<sup>3</sup>.

Schooling reinforces the gendered inequality of socialisation across all divide. Gender is the most pervasive form of inequality. It cuts across all caste, class and community. Schooling actually reinforces the gendered inequality of socialisation and social control. Schooling curriculum and schooling become active instruments of cultural reproduction and social control. Schooling permits them to move into public spaces, interact with males, but social control is remaining in the form of controlling sexuality. Small girls are given freedom to sent to primary school, but the nearer they are to puberty; more restrictions are imposed on them.

The patriarchal society determines the type, quality, duration of education they receive, whether they work or not and what kind of jobs they take up. The educational system is not designed to question the existing value system. Teachers are the important facilitators of our value system. The same value system makes women teachers a necessity in the school.

**Role of Teacher in Gender Socialisation:** Teachers are the key agents in the gender socialisation that occurs at schools. Teachers not only educate, but also transmit the values, norms and traditions shared in the society. This is delivered through the implicit messages. These unstated messages are known as part of the hidden curriculum. Especially they have a vital role in primary level more than an educator. “Teachers are the product of their own societies; therefore they reflect the values and expectation of their societies. Many teachers are socialised to believe that female should be passive, kind and dependent whereas male should be aggressive, competent and independent”<sup>4</sup>.

Different beliefs and expectations of teachers towards their students will result in gender inequity in the classroom. In order to create a gender equitable environment, Masland (1994) stress that “teacher must be aware of the gender bias in a society, be aware about the society offers different roles and aspiration to men and women”<sup>5</sup>. It seems likely that men and women take such learned behaviour and values into the classroom with them. It affects the way they teach and rest of their lives. The teacher reaffirms the roles and attitudes through the learning environment and classroom practices. A process that begins with the home gets reestablished and consolidated within the school.

Erickson, also identifies the role of teacher in the stage of identity formation. The school teachers plays

an important role in maintaining, modifying and reshaping her understanding of location, in terms of her class, caste, gender, religion, sexuality and region<sup>6</sup>. Teachers are deeply embedded in given structures of power. Teachers do not initially teach in a sexist manner. “They are the products of their own gender role socialisation and teacher education programs that ignore the inequities in schools”<sup>7</sup>.

**Statement of the Problem:** The main focus of the study is to analyse the attitude of Primary school teachers on gender role differentiation and their related role and behaviour. Schools have made much progress in eliminating sex discrimination from their policies, programs and practices. However, vestiges of sex discrimination, sex biases, and sex stereotyping remain. The vestiges continue to have a powerful and often negative influence on students. Studies showing male and female students treated differently in the same classroom. Delmont (1990) argued that “teacher’s gender role beliefs might predict their behaviour which turn could affect children’s gender role perceptions and behaviour”<sup>8</sup>.

Primary school teachers play a key role in the social and intellectual development of students between the ages of six and twelve. When the child begins school life, the teacher becomes one of the most significant adults in the student’s life other than their parents. Tracy & Lane (1999) found that, “there are some institutional factors such as school structure, biased instructional materials and traditional division labour in school, teachers appear to extremely important in that they play key role in the diverse experience that male and female face”<sup>9</sup>. So it is important to investigate the attitude of primary school teacher on gender roles. This study focuses on the attitude of teachers about (a) gender roles (b) the role of the teacher in relation to gender roles and (c) specific educational practices in the classroom.

Gender sensitive teachers can achieve significant results by making a conscious and concerted effort to not only avoids gender inequities in the classroom, but to actively encourage the reverse of such inequities. Gender equitable education should be understood as not only eliminating gender discrimination, but also integrating the experience and needs of male and female into all educational practices and ultimately enabling them to overcome traditional gender relations through education. Preparing the future teachers with an understanding of gender role will result in better academic and social learning for girls and boys and equip them for their life. Researcher expects it will lead a good academic discussion in the national level. It will helps to thinks about gender friendly teaching-learning process in the classroom.

**Objectives of the Study:**

1. To assess the Primary school teachers perceptions towards the gender roles.
2. To analyse the relationship of sex, age and marital status of teachers and their belief about gender roles.
3. To analyse the perception of teachers on their role in classroom.
4. To analyse the perception of teachers on specific students characteristics and educational situation in the classroom.

**Methodology:** Researcher followed a qualitative analysis. Case studies are included by conducting in-depth interview with the selected primary school teachers in Pondicherry. Class room Observation was the other method used for the study.

**Case Studies:** Researcher interviewed the respondents to know about teacher's attitude on gender roles, specifically on marital roles, parental roles, educational roles and employment roles of men and women in the society. Researched used Case Studies to study the multitude of variables through different cases. Four Cases has selected consists of two female teachers and two male teachers.

**Case 1:** Sethuraman, 45 years is a primary school teacher, who has 17 years of teaching experience. He is working in a Govt. Primary School in kalapet. He takes classes, for students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> standard. He has M.A and M.Ed as his master's qualification. He is spending 6 hours each day with his students. They are following combination of playing, teaching methods in their classrooms. In school girls and boys occupy different spaces, he also continuing the same norm in his classroom.

Researcher interviewed the respondent for an hour to know about his attitude on gender roles. Initially the researcher asked about the role of 'husband' and 'wife' in a marital relationship. He replied that, 'Both wife and husband can do all the works like cleaning, cooking. Sometime I used to 'help' my wife, but it makes me feel ashamed in front of others. My wife also discourages to do the housework'io.

He believes that gender segregated roles are necessary to follow. Otherwise it becomes a subject of discussion, when violating the gender norms of the society. Work sometimes considered as a credit and it is not at all a shared responsibility. Women supposed to do all these functions such as taking out waste, cleaning, washing etc. In his opinion; women can do these jobs properly. According to him, husband should be the head of the family, who is supposed to take major decisions in the family. Wife's support is essential for the requirement of the family. In his opinion, home is safe place for women. They are facing so many problems outside the home. In his opinion, if the family is economically sound then there is no need for women to work outside.

According to him, taking care of children is not the primary responsibility of mother, but it is better when a mother takes care of her children more than father. In his opinion teaching is appropriate job for women and business is suitable job for men. Nowadays, women have occupied all areas i.e tradition as well as non-traditional. When researcher asks about political role of women, he responds "I will welcome the Women's Reservation Bill". But it is risky job for women and all the family work will collapse. Politics is not at all suitable for women.

According to him, education is compulsory for both men and women. If women get education, she can look after family in a proper way .Education necessary to men because he is the earning member of the family. Regarding the subject of study, literature is suited for girls and engineering and technical courses are suited to boys as career profession.

The researchers observed the group work assigned by the same teacher at school. It was found that teachers are assigning different works to student's .When the researcher entered into school; students were planting trees in the garden. Teacher was giving instructions to the students. Researcher observed that male student and female students doing different jobs. Researcher enquired the teacher, 'why you are allotting different works to students on the basis of gender? He replied that, 'then only they can do the respective job at their home'. They are following an extreme gender division in the school atmosphere. Boys and girls occupy different space in the classroom, playground. Teachers following traditional method to register the name of the student, that contains boys first and girls following.

**Case 2:** A.Siva,27 years old man, who is the teacher in Kalapet Govt Primary School. He got married and belongs to Christian community. He had B.A, B.Ed and DT.Ed as his qualifications. He is taking all subjects to 4<sup>th</sup> standard students. He had 3 years of experience in teaching profession. Daily he used to spend 6 hours with his students. He loves teaching profession; in his view teaching is suitable for both men and women. When the researcher enquired about women going outside work, he replied that "if one (woman) is interested, can do any work". When the researcher enquired about domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning in the family, he told that it is to be a 'shared' between husband and wife.

To him, working women have the double burden of household and paid work. In his case, he has a working wife in some cases he is also 'helping' in housework. In his opinion husband and wife have to take the major decisions in the family. Traditionally major decisions in the home are taken by the male member of the family. He always pays attention to make the class gender equitable one. He consciously highlights some women role models by giving their

name to students for their knowledge (women can equally contribute to society).

When the researcher asked about educational role of men and women, he stated that women need more education because she was historically discriminated always. Education and working experience gives more boosts up confidence in women. According to him individuals (male or female) can select subjects according to their interest. He stresses on the importance of the equal education of men and women. Nevertheless, when researcher interrogated about the purpose of educating women and men; he replied that 'When women get education means whole of the family gets educated, a men gets education means he is only privileged'. This is nothing but directly connecting women's education with her household responsibilities. In fact in a patriarchal society, male head determines the major decisions of the family including the education of the young generation. Then it's merely an idealization of the feminine role. Education of individual women never considered as for her individual development. Here he is reinforcing the stereotypical role of men and women as breadwinner and homemaker.

**Case 3:** R.Jyothi, 38 years old, is the Primary School teacher in Government .Primary school, Kanakachettikulam. She is having 13 years experience in teaching. She belongs to Thiruvalluvar community. She completed D.T.Ed and teaches Tamil language to 1 to 4<sup>th</sup> standard students. According to her, boys needed more education because the family is 'dependent' on them. Science and literature is most suitable subjects for female students. For boys professional courses are more suitable because job is ultimate for them. According to her teaching is the most suitable job for women because it had fixed working hours, a stable income and time to devote attention to the household as well. She believes in segregation of gender roles in the household and had no complaints about balancing between paid work and housework. The underlying premise was that there was no alternative. She told that 'my husband is very supportive', so that he allowed to work after marriage. She admitted that, she feels bad to ask help from her husband for the household work.

**Case 4:** Lakshmi is a 55 years old woman. She is the head mistress of one of the private primary school. She has 25 years experience in teaching field. When the researcher interrogated about marital roles of husband and wife, she replied that women have to do important roles as wife. According to her '*oru kudumba pen nallavalaga erunthal, avaludaya kudumbavum nanraga erukum*' (If women is responsible to the family, the whole family will be good).

She told it is very difficult to manage two work as a teacher and household work. She hired a domestic

helper in her home, but she proclaimed that her husband would not eat food cooked by anyone else, so workers are confined to cleaning and other works. To her provision of food remains primary responsibility of wifehood and motherhood. To her cleaning, cooking, taking care of children is the primary responsibility of a woman. Husband should be the head of the family. He should have the disciplinarian role in the family. It is better; husband should take all the major decisions regarding family. Teaching is most appropriate job for female than male, with this job women get more time to spend with her family. To bring out qualitative analysis of the attitude on gender roles regarding parental, marital, and educational and employment roles, of primary school teachers the researcher conducted case studies. In all cases respondents reflect the traditional gender role divisions that exist in our society. All of them are admit that role and responsibilities in life should be shared equally. But as evidenced from the narration, they uphold the patriarchal power structures of family which place men and women in hierarchical order. As far as employment concerned is the first respondent reflects biased attitude on women's work. For him women employment should be restricted on the ground of safety. The second respondent, a male teacher, acknowledges women's right to work, but yet he is worried about double burden of the employed women. All of them prefer women for the teaching profession. They just associate teaching profession to the caring role of 'mother'. All of them are have unanimous opinion on educating girls and boys and its purpose. They insist that girls should pursue the courses of studies which are appropriate to their future familial role and for boys they insist the courses which would satisfy the 'breadwinner' role of man. 'When women get education means whole the family gets educated, a men gets education means he is only privileged' this is the one of the common comment made by the four respondents. They are not only relating women's education to the familial but also denying the chance to women to fulfill their multiple roles in the society. Here they are reinforcing the stereotypical role of men and women. Through scientific observation the researcher found that they are following an extreme gender division in the school atmosphere. Boys and girls occupy different spaces in the classrooms and in the playgrounds. Even in the writings of names in the attendance register, the names of the boys were recorded first and names of girls were noted down. They are allotting different duties to boys and girls. Even this is the reflection of their traditional attitudes.

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