
UNIT 11 GENDER ISSUES IN EDUCATION



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11.0 INTRODUCTION

You have studied in earlier units about various disadvantaged groups and their problems. Another disadvantaged group which needs a teachers' attention is girls and women. Girls and women face severe social disadvantages merely because they are female. This is a matter of great concern for all right thinking people, society, nation and the world at large. The disadvantages women face are unique in several ways. Hence we need to discuss this separately. Addressing this problem is important to make our families, society and the nation increasingly better, humane and just. Doing so has a critical bearing on the social, ethical and economic development of the nation. In this unit we shall learn about the inequality between males and females, their causes, their forms. We shall also discuss the various initiatives for creating a more equal and equitable society for men and women. We shall also discuss the roles of schools and teachers in creating a better world where men and women are treated with equal respect and are given equal opportunities for development.

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- state the differences between sex and gender
- cite examples for biological attributes and gender attributes
- classify the given set of statements as sex-related or gender-related
- list the major social and cultural attributes of boys and girls
- explain the meaning and causes of gender discrimination
- justify the need to counter gender discrimination
- give illustrations/arguments/facts to show the existence of gender discrimination in our society
- explain the role of teachers in creating a gender-fair society.

11.2 CONCEPT OF GENDER

11.2.1 DISTINCTION BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER

Have you heard of the word '**Gender**'? Some people use this word to mean the '**sex**' of a person. However, these two words have different shades of meaning. While filling an application you are asked

Sex of person indicates a boy or girl, a male or female, a man or woman. This distinction is based on the natural differences that exists in the body of males and a females. These differences are biological and do not generally change.



to mention your sex. You indicate your sex as male or female. That means sex indicates whether the person is a boy or girl, man or woman. This distinction is

Gender is what we make of boys and girls. It is about the opportunities we give them to develop. It has got to do with their upbringing, socialization, culture and the role models we present for them. Gender is what a society and culture makes of boys and girls.

based on the special body parts associated with reproduction. For instance women have uterus. It is a part of their biology. Likewise, men have prostate gland. This is a part in the body of a male. Like this, there are some differences in the body of male and females. This is made by nature to facilitate reproduction and a few related functions. Thus, the sex of a person is the biological characteristics of person that makes one a male or female.

Now let us understand the term ‘Gender’. The society expects different types of behaviour from boys and girls. Boys are generally expected to be bold and aggressive. Men are expected to go out, work and earn. He is the ‘bread winner’. Women are expected to be mild, timid. They are seen as ‘home-makers’. This is a social arrangement made by the society and not nature given. The society assigns different roles for men and women, divides work as ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’, values the work done by men and women differently and gives certain privileges and responsibilities for the two. It also imposes different types of restrictions on men and women.

The personality of males and females that emerges out of these social conditions is what we call gender.

Thus, gender refers to those attributes, roles and functions expected of men and women in a given society. Gender changes from time to time and from culture to culture.

Let us now understand the major differences between sex and gender

SEX	GENDER
Biological construct	Socio-cultural construct
Nature made	Society made
Constant	Variable
Individual	Systemic
Non-hierarchical	Hierarchical
Cannot be changed!	Changeable

11.2.2 BIOLOGICAL AND GENDER ATTRIBUTES OF A PERSON

Biological attributes of a person: A human being is generally born as a male or



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female. Nature has given it to the female to conceive, deliver a baby and breastfeed the baby. This requires special organs. Since these biological tasks are not given to the male, the organs concerned are not present in males. However, we find a different set of organs in males for the roles they play in reproduction. These differences are natural. Some of the organs in males and females associated with reproduction are shown in Figure 1. Study the figure carefully and list the organs of reproduction in males and females.

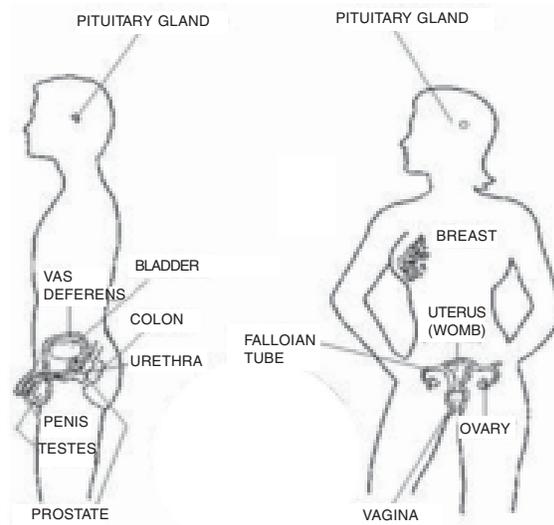


Figure 1: Difference in the body parts of male and female

Let us consider a few use examples to strengthen our understanding of sexual differences between a male and female. An adult male produces sperms while an adult female produces ovum. This has nothing to do with society or culture. This is completely natural and does not change from nation to nation or across cultural groups. Let us consider another biological difference between a male and female. The presence of XX sex chromosomes in a human makes the person a female. The presence of XY sex chromosomes makes a person a male. A female has uterus while male does not. Now you know why? Again this is a biological difference. Let us consider some more biological difference between a male and a female:

♂	♀
1. The voice becomes horse during adolescence	1. The voice becomes shriller during adolescence
2. Hairs grow on the face [beard and mustaches]	2. Breasts enlarge during adolescence
3. The body may become muscular	3. The body becomes soft
4. No menstrual cycle	4. Menstrual cycle begins at adolescence
5. Any other :.....	5. Any other :.....
6.	6.



Gender attributes of a person: The biological differences- the fact being a male or female does not limit the participation or success of a person in any social activity. However, we see more males in certain spheres and more women in certain other spheres of life. Why is this so? Society thinks that certain types of work are meant to be done by males only and certain others by females. For example, we rarely see women tilling a land using a plough. Many people think that tilling is a ‘male job’. Similarly, we rarely see males washing clothes of children and other family members. This, people generally consider as ‘female job’. Usually the household work is considered as women’s work. Any work outside home is believed to be for boys and men. Most of us believe that ‘difficult jobs’ are done by men and ‘easy jobs’ are done by women. We also believe that women are best suited for certain jobs such as nursing or teaching. Similarly some jobs are thought to suit best for men. What is your view on this?

We also have notions of male and female characteristics. These notions have nothing to do with the sex of the person. The society imposes certain roles, functions, characteristics and expectations on the basis of one’s sex. These differences in roles, expectations and perceptions, imposed by the society and culture, constitute gender differences. We shall understand this further with few examples.

Society generally expects girls to be soft, well mannered, mild, and obedient and so on. At the same time we expect boys to be bold, aggressive, strong, and so on. Why do we expect the behaviour of boys to be different from those of girls? These differences are not natural. They are imposed by the society. Such differences between boys and girls which are not natural are gender differences. There aren’t any visible distinctions between the physical characteristics of boys and girls in their early childhood except in the genitals. However, the physical differences become sharp and visible with the onset of puberty. Further, the difference in their social and psychological characteristics becomes obvious as they grow up. Some of these characteristics are given in table below.



Figure 2: Play things like bat and toy jeep for boys and dolls and kitchen wares for girls



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Factors	Male	Female
Sex	Stronger	Fair and weaker
Body	Rough and strong Invulnerable Impenetrable Loud voice	Smooth and weak Soft and Delicate Highly vulnerable Shrill voice
Social	Principal wage earner Head of the household Leader in the community Born to lead Controller Resource allocator Hoarse voice Independent in thought & action Adventurous Masterful Intelligent Mastery in mechanical tasks Good in Science and Math Worldly wise	Family person Ideal mother, Wife, sister Sacrificing Meant to Serve Controlled Resource consumer Soft voice Dependent in thought and action Sensible Graceful and Pretty Innate nature Poor in mechanical tasks Strong in languages Stupid
Psychological	Highly rational High in social intelligence Manipulative Impatient and disturbed Careless and rugged Wields power Cares for good looks	Highly emotional Poor in social intelligence Emotive Patient and calm Conscious of her body Succumbs to it Cares for money and status

Society values boys and girls differently. The birth of a male baby, for instance, is celebrated with pomp while the birth of a female baby is not a happy event for many.

Why is this so? We bring up boys and girls differently. We punish and praise boys and girls for different reasons. We get different types of play materials for boys and girls. What makes people to do so? This is again a gender related difference. Girls too can play with a toy jeep or cricket bat. Boys too can play with toy babies, dolls and kitchenware. They even enjoy that activity. However they are rarely encouraged to do so.

The opportunity to participate in out-of-home activities is far more limited to girls than boys. Boys are encouraged to move out of home while girls are encouraged to stay indoors. All these can influence the personality of boys and girls.



11.2.3 GENDER AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

Gender differences are culturally influenced and socially constructed. This is why we see lot difference in gender roles and expectations across cultures. For instance, women in many parts of our country are generally expected to wear sarees and grow long hairs. In certain other cultures it is normal for women to wear skirts and to cut their hair short. People do internalize gender roles and expectations as they grow up. Children learn to categorize themselves by gender very early in life. A part of this learning is to display their ‘manly’ qualities and ‘womanly’ qualities. Boys learn to manipulate their physical and social environment through physical strength or other skills, while girls learn to present themselves as objects to be viewed. Children monitor their own and others’ gendered behavior and model themselves along the established patterns they see in significant others. The significant other could be their parents, neighbours, teachers, movies or media presentations. Gender-segregated activities create belief that gender differences are essential nature of males and females. Gender differences get strengthened through our practices, beliefs and institutions as the society and culture places different values to males and females. Viewing males and females as categories opposites of each other reinforces the gender differences. The gender differences between boys and girls, is largely a learnt behaviour which is an outcome of socialization and enculturing. This is why we say that *gender is a socio-cultural construction*.



Activity 11.1

1. State whether the following statements are ‘True’ or ‘False’. Write your response in the blank provided in each statement:
 - a) Gender characteristics are natural differences.
 - b) Being a male or female is a biological attribute
 - c) Gender attributes change from one society to another
 - d) Gender of a person is generally a constant while sex is subject to change.
 - e) Gender is a product of culture and socialization
 - f) Being a female is in itself a negative thing for the person
2. Classify the following as ‘biological attribute’ and ‘gender attribute’:
 - a) Males are more intelligent than females
 - b) Women may bear children.
 - c) Female voice is generally shriller than that of males.
 - d) Males are more self-confidence than females



- e) Certain types of social activities are not suitable for women.
- f) Males have greater tolerance to pain than females
- g) Females have XX chromosome while males have XY chromosomes.
- h) For a women, the looks and character are more important than anything else
- i) Some jobs are more suitable to females than to males.
- j) Household work is the duty of all women and girls
- k) Woman, thy name is jealousy!

11.3 GENDER DISCRIMINATION

We do not treat boys and girls the same way. Men and women do not get equal opportunities to participate in all social, political, economic and educational activities. Why? Have you ever given a thought to this? Are women incapable of being equals in these spheres of life? Being a girl or woman does not limit her capability. Despite this, women are denied opportunities to function fully in many spheres of life. Denial of opportunity smacks of a bias and discrimination. Let us study in this section the meaning of gender bias and how it affects boys and girls.

11.3.1 MEANING OF DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Let us first understand the word 'discrimination' with one or two examples. Let us say, in a village, the people belonging to scheduled caste are not allowed to draw water from a well while others are free to do so. Water is a basic necessity for all. Denying water from the nearby well puts the people in to a distinct disadvantage. This is caste based discrimination. Let us take another example. Let us say there are two people, equally capable, one with a dark skin and the other with fair skin. We have to make a selection for an activity. Not selecting a person merely because of dark skin is a discriminatory practice.

The position of United Nations on discrimination includes a statement that: '*Discriminatory behaviors take many forms, but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection*'. Thus, discrimination refers to treatment or consideration against a person or group merely because the person/group belongs to a particular class, or category. Discrimination disregards individual need, merit and potential. Thus, discrimination has a negative connotation. It tends to and intends to treat one particular group of people less favourably than others because of some unjustifiable prejudice. Do you find any discriminatory practices in your place? Make a list of them. Think of the prejudices that might have led to such practices.



Now, let us come to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is discrimination on the basis of sex. It is the unequal treatment of a person based solely on that person's sex. Gender discrimination is sometimes referred to as sexism. Sexism occurs in any social situation where a prejudicial treatment occurs which would not have occurred had they been the opposite sex. Any unfair consideration, policy, practice or belief which treats men and women unequally and hence restricts or denies choices for members of a particular sex is gender discrimination. This is considered a form of prejudice and is illegal in certain circumstances. Providing separate toilets for boys and girls does not tantamount to discrimination. Instead, it is an act showing gender sensitivity.

Sometimes discrimination may not be as obvious as shown in Figure 3. It may occur while making selections. There would be no reason or rationale for such discrimination. Have you come across any discriminatory advertisements?



A girl in a family wants to go to her friend's house for doing a project. She is either not allowed or asked to come back before it is dusk. No such restrictions are placed on boys. Simply, she is not allowed to do certain things because she is a 'girl'.

Consider another extreme case. In certain cultures women are not allowed to drive. Men are not allowed to drive women unless they are closely related to. Here, the dilemma is how to get the girls to school in buses driven by men. If no men are allowed to come in contact with schoolgirls, and women are not allowed to drive, who will be driving the school buses? What will happen to the education of the girls?

We often see boys playing in the open ground with lot of sports materials. Girls on the other hand are allowed to play indoor games with hardly any play material. Sometimes they are denied opportunities to play even the indoor games. Why does this happen? Is this justified?

Gender discrimination can also affect boys and men. For instance, a boy who is injured while playing is not expected to cry. Why? This is simply because he is a 'boy'. He is not supposed to accept defeat in anything. A man cannot become a 'home maker'. This is also gender discrimination. However, the discrimination as of today is largely loaded against women and girls. This is why we are paying attention on the issue of discrimination against girls and women. Hence gender discrimination as we understand today is the discrimination against girls and women.

11.3.2 SOURCES AND FORMS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination can be direct and indirect, blatant or subtle. Direct discrimination



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occurs when gender is used as an explicit reason for discriminating. Let us consider an example. You want to select a student leader for your class. You as a teacher may think that it is better to have a boy as class leader, and select a boy rather than a girl. This is direct discrimination. Dismissing worker on grounds of pregnancy is direct discrimination.

Indirect discrimination occurs when there are provisions and practices which put girls and women at a disadvantage. For example if an employer gets new furniture for only the male workers, it is indirect gender discrimination.



Figure4: Sources of gender discrimination

Gender discrimination against girls and women can take many forms, although it may vary from one culture to another. Gender discrimination can originate from several sources. It begins from the family and extends to schools, public places, work place, and appointment to jobs, police stations, courts, political parties, parliament, and legislations and so on. Figure 4 gives you an idea of the various sources of gender discrimination. Study the figure carefully. Identify at least two practices of gender discrimination in each of these.



Figure 5: Female foeticide and robbing childhood of girls

Gender discrimination begins before the birth of a girl child. This is underscored by large instances of female foeticide despite laws against this practice. Preference of parents [society] for boy babies is too well known. Girls are largely neglected in the family while the boys get special treatment. The nutritional and health requirements of girls are generally neglected. This results in higher mortality of girl children. Denial of opportunity to education, discouraging girls to take up courses of their choice, discouraging girls from pursuing higher education are quite common even now. In the employment sector, men usually get priority over women.

There are often basic inequalities in gender relations within the family. These inequalities can take many different forms. For instance, inequalities may exist in sharing the burden of household work and child care putting a huge burden on women and girls. This will have its impact on girls and women in areas of education, employment and promotion. It can also limit their understanding of the outside world. It also has far-reaching effects on their knowledge and understanding of different types of work in professional circles.

Many young girls have to assist in household work, take care of their younger siblings and hence are forced to stay at home. This affects their education and future apart from taking away their childhood. There are many instances where girls are taken out of the schools on attaining puberty. In some cultures, the practice of mutilating the genitals exists. Women are harassed for not bearing a male child. More girl children die due to malnutrition. There are instances of female babies either discarded or killed by parents themselves. These are some of the well recognized instances of gender discrimination.

When it comes to the choice of courses to be studied, gender discrimination operates in a subtle way. Girls are discouraged from taking up certain courses especially if she has to move away from parents. Many people think that a course in mechanical engineering is not suitable for girls! Jobs like clerical, teaching, nursing and housekeeping are unjustifiably considered more appropriate for girls.

Restrictions on movement and travel, discouragement to earn a living, eve teasing, preventing woman from taking up a job of her choice, denial of property rights, denial of opportunity for expression and movement, sexual harassment in work



places, eve teasing, domestic violence, physical abuse are some of the forms of gender discrimination. It is also gender discrimination to provide different working conditions. This may happen in salaries, hiring, promotion or bonus criteria. Gender discrimination can occur in admissions, selections, and placements or in athletic and scholastic opportunities.

We find gender discrimination with regard to ownership and use of property. Basic assets such as homes and land are shared unequally between males and females. The absence of claims to property reduce the voice of women, make it harder for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and even some social activities. This type of inequality has existed in most parts of the world, though there are local variations. For example, traditional property rights have favoured men in most parts of India. However, there are efforts in the form of legislative changes in the recent past to bring about equality in property rights.

The educational system in a way works to maintain the inequalities that exist between girls and boys. Firstly, the textbooks that are used in schools depict boys as tough, rough and mentally skilled people who are adventurous whilst girls are depicted as soft, gentle people who enjoy carrying out household duties. Even the uniforms for boys and girls are different. The uniform prescribed to girls often may not be suitable for certain school activities such as rough play or tree climbing. Secondly, when children start attending school they come with inequalities already shaped within them. This aspect is usually ignored by the school system. Thirdly, in the school environment, the girl child is a victim of her sexuality as well. Males may make sexual advances at her in return for cash, marks or other material gains and failure to comply may lead to violence.

Basically, gender discrimination is the denial of freedom of choice to girls and women.

We see many instances of discrimination operating through our social institutions. In many cultures, arranged or forced marriages are still very common, often resulting in sexual abuse. Women often do not have the same rights regarding divorce or inheritance. Polygamy is also a cause of gender discrimination. In many areas of work, especially in the unorganized sectors, women get paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. The parents discouraging girls from taking up a job is not uncommon.

11.3.3 CAUSES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

It is quite difficult to pin point the exact causes of gender bias and discrimination. It emerges from a combination of several social, cultural, economic and historical factors. However, it is possible to identify few factors that have lead to the present disparities between men and women.

According to Human Rights Inc., one of the main causes of gender discrimination



is religion. The tradition and religious texts shape the way people think and act. Many religions place women below men, and thus create an unequal society. Discriminatory injunctions imposed by the religion are practiced by the followers often without any questioning. Almost all religions have their personal laws and all such laws confer fewer rights to women. Do find any such content in the religion you practice? Have you come across gender bias in any of the religious texts or practices?

As we have already learnt, gender is a socio-cultural construct. Culture shapes the way we think and do things. The superiority of the male and the suppression of female are built-into certain cultures.

Upbringing of children and the role models they get in their early socialization will have a huge influence on the personality. Parents often are seen as role models by boys and girls. The girls emulate the mother while the boys their father. The parents in the family perpetuate, sometimes involuntarily, the inferior social position of females by raising their children according to traditional gender roles. From infancy through early childhood and beyond, boys and girls learn what is expected of them, and behave accordingly. Girls and boys are perceived and treated differently from the moment they are born. Parents describe newborn daughters as tiny, soft, and delicate, and sons as tough and strong. Further, they interact differently with newborn daughters and sons.

How the parents treat their children may be the most important factor in the creation of sex stereotypes. Sex stereotype is *a shared popular set of beliefs and expectations, often without any basis, about qualities of females and males*. Boys and girls get different play materials. Daughters are treated more protectively and they are subjected to more restrictions and controls. Boys receive more encouragement for being bold, adventurous and achieving. The parents place different expectations from their sons and daughters. Parents reinforce gender appropriate behavior of both boys and girls with rewards and positive feedback and punish them when they do not fall into their expectations. Peers too will promote gender stereotypes.

Girl children are often perceived to be a burden by many parents. Therefore, they do not like to invest more on their education, health or development. A lower level of education results in a substandard job, which in turn results in poverty and dependence. This dependence will further convince men of the inferiority of women. Women who lack education also lack the tools to improve their situation and combat discrimination.

The books children read, the stories they hear can also reinforce gender bias and biases practices. The near invisibility of girls and women in any substantive roles will convince the children of the superiority of the males. Educational institutions, teachers and curriculum also contribute significantly in promoting gender bias and discriminatory practices. Girls and boys sitting in the same



classrooms, studying same books, under same set of teachers are educated differently. The other causes of gender discrimination include illiteracy, caste system, family prestige, income levels of the family and societal norms. There is a vicious circle in which values, beliefs and practices favour men and their domination [We call this as patriarchy] which create gendered unequal relationships.

As you have understood by now, gender bias and gender discrimination has its origins in numerous places. They get reinforced in just as many ways. Equal accessibility for girls can only come when parents, schools, people representatives, media, social groups and manufacturers work together for equal accessibility. Parents need to participate both in the home and school settings to ensure empowerment of their daughters. The government, administrators, schools and teachers must actively encourage the education and social participation of girls. When this happens, the cause of gender equality gets strengthened.

11.3.4 ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

There are many theories to explain the origin of gender discrimination. The most forceful explanations of gender inequality are given by what are called 'materialist theories'. These theories use cross-cultural data on the status of women and men to explain gender inequality. These theorists argue that gender inequality is an outcome of how women and men are tied to the economic structure of society. They stress on the control and distribution of valued resources as key facts that puts men in an advantageous position. The economic inequality, dependence, political confusion, and unhealthy social relations are at the roots of inequality between men and women. This view holds that the subordination of women is not a result of her biology but of social relations.

The emergence of a family structure required division of labour. For reasons understandable, the domestic work came to women while men got involved in activities outside home. This type of division of labour particularly constrained women and proved advantageous to men. Men came to be associated with property, power, and prestige. The reproductive roles and responsibilities of domestic labour placed a limit on women to their association with, access to and control over valued resources. There are other theories about the origin of gender inequality. Try to know about them.

Sexism has historically has operated most often to the disadvantage of women. **The National Policy on Education 1986** recognizes the long history of gender inequality when it says that gender inequality is a 'cumulative distortion' of the past.

The origin of the Indian idea of appropriate female behavior can be traced to the rules laid down by Manu in 200 BCE:



IX.3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

Some scholars hold the view that women in ancient India enjoyed equal status and rights. The status of women, however, began to decline with the Smritis and with the advent of rulers from other cultures. Treating women as a commodity perhaps happened little later. The position of Indian woman further deteriorated during the medieval period when Sati among some communities, child marriages, dowry system and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life. The purdah practice came to vogue. Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practiced and was once considered a status symbol for many a man. A few reformatory movements such as Jainism admitted women to their religious order. Despite this women, by and large, faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started around sixth century.

Even today, despite education, development and legislations, the suppression of women continues in our society. Instances of sexual exploitation, trafficking, dowry deaths, domestic violence, abduction, molestation, rape, acid attacks, genital mutilation, female foeticide, female infanticide, neglect of aged are continuing unabated.

**Activity 11.2**

- I. State whether the following statements are true or false. If false, correct the statements:
 1. Preference for male child is reflective of the bias against women.
 2. Parents have no role in promoting gender equality.
 3. Teachers can play a vital role in creating a gender fair society.
 4. PNDT Act was promulgated to fight the menace of dowry system in India.
 5. Indian constitution does not discriminate between men and women.
 6. The number of females for every thousand males is decreasing in our country.
 7. Biological factors are largely responsible for the subjugation of women.
 8. All teachers show gender sensitivity in their classroom practices.
- II. Which of the following is an example for gender discrimination or gender bias?
 1. A teacher not assigning certain kinds of school work to girls.



2. Providing fee exemption and scholarship to all girls who pursue higher education.
3. Reservation for women candidates in JillaPanchayats and village panchayats.
4. Police not registering a case when a woman comes with a complaint.
5. Eve teasing in buses.
6. Provision separate examination room for women patients in a government hospital.
7. Granting maternity and child care leave to women.
8. Asking a victim of molestation to not tell anyone what has happened.

III. Choose the most appropriate answer in each of the following:

1. Women deserve no freedom. This statement is made in
 - (a) Ramayan
 - (b) Manu smriti
 - (c) Mahabharath
 - (d) Upanishads
2. Which one of the following is not illegal in India?
 - (a) Committing or abetting Sati
 - (b) Taking or giving dowry
 - (c) Giving special privileges to girls to promote women sports
 - (d) Sexual harassment in work places
3. Which one of the following is an instance of gender discrimination?
 - (a) Mentioning names of both parents in the progress report of the child
 - (b) Encouraging girls to pursue non-conventional courses
 - (c) Respecting women and their need for some privacy.
 - (d) Men are paid more salary than women for doing the same job.

11.4 STATUS INDICATORS OF GENDER

In order to understand the disparities between men and women, we need to understand the status of men and women. Do women and men enjoy equal opportunities, equal right and equal respect? What is the situation in India? If there is gender inequality, what are the indicators? The status of education, health, ownership of property, work participation, age of marriage, atrocities against women can describe the status of men and women in our society. Let us briefly study these status indicators:



11.4.1 SEX RATIO

A very important and a highly sensitive index of the status of women in a society is the 'sex-ratio'. Sex-ratio is defined as the number of females for every 1000 males. In any society, the number of females for 1000 males should be at least 1000. Unfortunately the sex ratio in our country continues to be low. The situation is all the more alarming in



urban areas. Another important consideration is the child sex ratio. It is the sex ratio among children aged 0-6 years. The United Nations Children's Fund has estimated that up to 50 million girls and women are 'missing' from India's population because of female foeticide and high mortality of the girl children due to lack of proper care. The census reports from 1901 to 2011 show a gradual fall in the sex ratio. The fall in the sex ratio in urban areas is more rapid than rural areas. According to 2011 census, the sex ratio in our country is 940 and the child sex ratio is 914. The unhealthy trend, by and large, continues. We must save our girls children to save our future.

11.4.2 EDUCATION

The status of women within their family and society has a direct linkage with their education. Thus, education forms a very basic indicator for gender equality and empowerment. Levels of female literacy, gender gaps in literacy levels, levels of enrolment and dropout rates at the primary level are relevant indicators. Higher levels of education are more likely to ensure self-esteem, higher earning capability, good health, and better control over their own life.

Despite a wide spread recognition of the value of education in the liberation of women, educational equality has remained elusive. A huge gender gap still exists in the literacy rate. More girls are dropping out of schools at various levels. Close to 245 million Indian women lack the basic capability to read and write. Adult literacy rates in the year 2000 for ages 15 and above were for 46.4% for females and 69% for males. What are, in your view, the factors responsible for lower literacy rates of girls? Are all the girls around your school coming to school? If not, what could be the possible reasons? Find out. Literacy rate is just one indicator. There are other indicators which include enrollment rates, dropout rates, and the number of girls at various grade levels. Find out the status of girls in these areas.

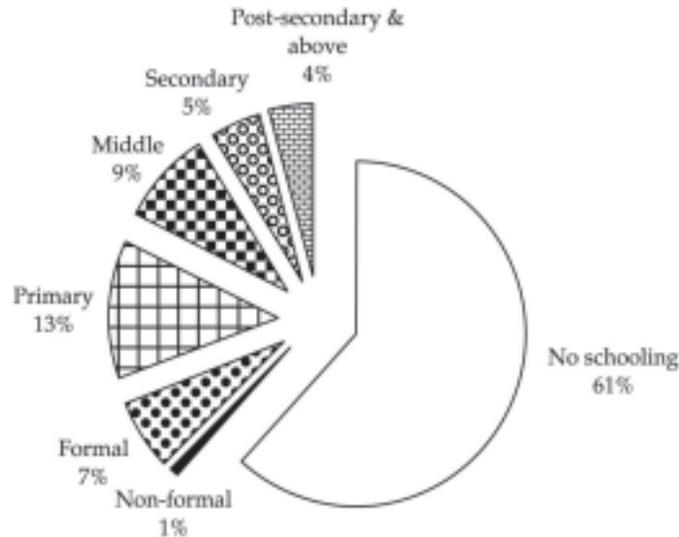


Figure 7: Educational attainment among women in India [Source: GOI, 2001]

The educational attainment of Indian women is shown in figure 7. You may note that the number of women as we move up in the educational ladder goes on dwindling. Many of the states are still far behind in the universalization of elementary education. What is the situation in your state? What measures are being adopted to meet the challenge?

11.4.3 HEALTH

All men and women have a basic right to health and well-being. However, statistics reveal that gender gaps are also persistent in health status, access to health services and health outcomes. Mortality rate of girls is the highest in the stage of infancy as compared to all other ages.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) is defined as the probable number among every 1,000 babies who would fail to survive within the first year of being born. Male infants are known to be more susceptible to death than females due to biological and genetic reasons. However, in India, the female infant mortality rate surpasses that of males. This reflects the socio-cultural influences on mortality.

The average nutritional intake of women in India is estimated to be 1400 calories daily. The necessary requirement is approximately 2200 calories. Many girls and women suffer from nutritional deficiency, anemia and underweight.

The minimum legal age for marriage of girls is 18 years. Despite the stipulation, many girls in India are being married off before 18 years of age. The problem is rampant in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Early marriage often results in early pregnancy, destruction of childhood, and denial of education. Pregnancies at young ages are more likely to result in underweight babies, stillbirths and abortions, especially



where mothers suffer from poor health and nutritional deficiencies. An estimate by the health and family welfare ministry made in 2008 has revealed that the national average age of marriage of girls which was 18.3 years in 2001 has moved up to 20.6 years in 2008. This is a welcome trend.

It is estimated that 38% of all HIV positive people in India are women. However, women occupy only 25% of beds in AIDS care institutions. The others are obviously being ignored. About 92% of women in India suffer from problems associated with reproduction system. About 300 women die every day due to childbirth and pregnancy related causes. The maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births per year, although declining, is still a matter of major concern.

The other indicators of health include maternal mortality rates, fertility rates and life expectancy. Try to know the status of women on these parameters.

11.4.4 PARTICIPATION IN WORKFORCE

Work plays an important part in determining relative wealth, power and prestige of men and women. Workforce participation refers to the share of the working age population who are either in a job or actively looking for one. Participation in the workforce matters because it affects the economic growth potential. Population, Participation and Productivity are the key factors which impact economic growth. Women constitute 50% of the population. However, their participation in labour force and productivity remains low.

The workplace can be a setting where we can observe gender inequalities. It could also be a factor that maintains inequalities. Thus it impacts the status of women. The data on work participation of women reveals the low participation rates of women in the work force. It has never crossed 35% for rural women and about 15% for the urban women during the last three decades. The participation of rural women is nearly three times that of urban women. The female participation in the work force is showing a decline during last few years. This is cause for concern.

Most of the women are either found in unorganized sectors such as agriculture, daily wage work and construction work or in lowly paid jobs. Most women are found doing unpaid labour. According to an estimate, women do 2/3 of the total manual labour. However, their contribution to economic growth is not given due recognition. Why is this? What women do is not 'work'!

Another related issue is wage parity. Wage parity is defined as equal pay for equal work. While women certainly have made great strides toward pay parity in the past 30 years, there is still a gap in earnings of men and women in equivalent professions. There are gendered notions of the value of work.



Traditionally 'women's work' is helping and supportive jobs. These jobs are not considered comparable in worth to the work that men do. This leads to wage gaps. Women clustered in low paying positions have lower bargaining power. Women are also more likely than men to work part-time, take time off for family reasons. This affects their take-home pay, and career opportunities. The wage gap is quite visible in unorganized sector.

Women hardly have any property in their name. Even if they have, they have very little control over it. Even amongst working women, the property is only a small portion of what men have. This also affects the status of women.

11.4.5 ATROCITIES AND CRIME

Atrocities and crimes against women are often a good indicator of their status in society. Although Women may be victims of any of the general crimes like robbery and cheating, only the crimes which are directed specifically against women are characterized as 'Crimes against Women'. Female foeticide, murder, child sexual abuse, eve teasing, molestation, dowry, early marriage, incest, rape, deprivation, trafficking, pushing into prostitution, forced abortions, abduction, mutilation of the genitals, indecent representation, stalking and domestic violence are some of the common crimes committed against women. According the statistics of 2005 provided by **National Crime Records Bureau** a rape occurs once in every 29 minutes, a molestation occurs in every 15 minutes, a case of sexual harassment occurs over 53 minutes, a murder of a female occurs in every 14 minutes, an act of cruelty occurs in every 9 minutes and a women dies due dowry harassment once in every 77 minutes. For further details you may refer to the website of National Crime Bureau of India.

Domestic violence, the violence that takes place within the walls of home, is increasingly recognized as a serious consequence of gender disparity. Higher education and possession of wealth and property are known to lower the risk of domestic violence. Government has enacted a law in 2005 to prevent domestic violence against women.

There is a popular saying that women's place in Society marks the measure of civilization. However, we find women entangled in the chains created by our culture and society. A schematic diagram of the entanglement of women in a vicious circle is shown in figure 8. We need to find ways to overcome these challenges in order to create a more just society for both men and women.

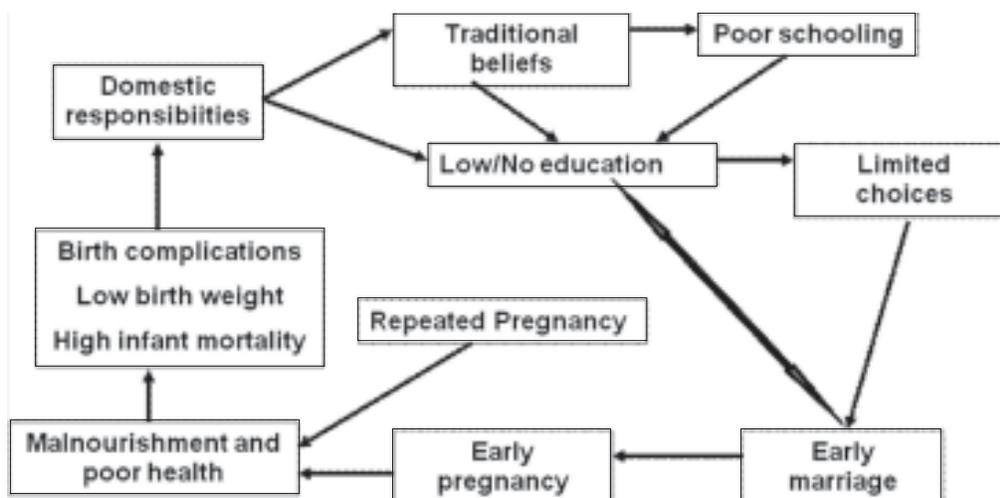


Figure 8: Women entanglement in the vicious circle of society and culture



Activity 11.3

I. In each of the following questions, select and encircle the letter of the most appropriate response from the choices given:

1. Which one of the following does not indicate the status of women in our society?

(a) Rights over property	(b) Education
(c) Knowledge of mother tongue	(d) Sex ratio
2. Sex ratio is defined as
 - (a) the number of females for every 1000 males
 - (b) the number of males for every 10000 females
 - (c) the number of females for every 1000 males
 - (d) the number of females for every 10000 males
3. Which one of the following is TRUE statement?
 - (a) Sex ratio is falling even in developed states of our country
 - (b) Educational level of women is slightly higher than that of men
 - (c) We find more women than men in highly paid professions.
 - (d) Early marriage is better for girls to avoid complications of pregnancy.
4. Marginalization of women in our society is linked to

(a) Experiencing disadvantages	(b) Prejudices
(c) Powerlessness	(d) All of these



5. Which one of the following statements is TRUE with regard to women?
 - (a) Low educational levels restrict their choices
 - (b) Domestic responsibilities and traditional beliefs results in poor schooling
 - (c) Early marriage leads to early pregnancy and poor health
 - (d) All of the above statements are true.
6. Which one of the following statements is true?
 - (a) Women with higher levels of education are unlikely to lead a happy life.
 - (b) Even unemployed women contribute to the economic progress of the country indirectly.
 - (c) Women workers do not deserve the same salary as men workers.
 - (d) Gendered division of labour is good for the economic progress of our country.

11.4.6 OVERCOMING GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination strengthens prejudice and promotes an unjust and unequal society. We must overcome this inequality because it is unfair and wrong. Gender discrimination does not respect individuals [girls and women] according to their aspirations, potentials or abilities. On the contrary, it holds back the growth of individuals, the development of nations and the evolution of societies. Gender equality is central to economic and human development. When women and men have relative equality, economies grow faster, children's health improves and civilization will move to higher levels of functioning. Gender equality is an important human right. Gender inequality is a constraint to the progress of any society because it limits the opportunities of one-half of its population. It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race and keeping that population away from social and economic activity. When women are constrained from reaching their full potential, that potential is lost to society as a whole. Further, one form of inequality justifies others and hence all form of equality must be fought and overcome. Gender equality liberates both sexes from suppression, pressures and stereotypes and hence creates a better social order. We need to promote education free from gender bias and strive to integrate gender knowledge and gender sensitivity into educational system.

11.4.7 GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN CLASSROOMS

Education can serve as a powerful tool in redefining gender relations and gender power and thus can bring about social transformation. However, the schools,



teachers and curriculum are perpetuating the biases and inequality between boys and girls. Numerous studies have shown that (i) boys get teachers attention of teachers (ii) teachers praise boys more often, (iii) boys receive more academic

Equity and Equality

Gender Equity is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages and create a level playing field. **Equity is a means to bring about equality and equitable outcomes.**

help (iv) teachers accept ideas and opinions of boys during classroom discussion (v) boys get more opportunities to interact, display leadership skills (vi) teachers criticize the girls severely when they deviate from gender roles (vii) teachers place lower academic expectation from girls (viii) handle curriculum materials without questioning the gender bias in the content (ix) teachers allocate resources of the school with a bias favouring boys (x) teachers

are insensitive to the needs of girls (xi) teachers use sexist language during their transactions both within the classroom and outside.

Bias and inequality are devastating to children's development and learning. They promote hostility, alienation, poor school performance, failure, and despair.

11.4.8 ROLE OF TEACHERS IN CREATING A GENDER-FAIR SOCIETY

National Policy on Education 1986 says Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering.

In the light of the above, a few questions will arise. Are our educational processes geared towards change? Are our educational institutions geared to bring about social transformation? Are educational institutions conscious of the responsibility and do they have the necessary wherewithal to make the processes gender responsive and the learning experiences empowering? The problem is teachers themselves are in the grip of gender bias and lack gender sensitivity. These can be achieved through the commitment of gender sensitive teachers and the co-operation of the schools. Teachers, individually and collectively, facilitate the development of knowledge, skill, attitudes and values for a healthy and fruitful living of men and women in an equal society. This requires GENDER SENSITIVITY.

The influence of teachers on gender roles of their students immensely impacts their educational outcomes as well as their roles in contemporary society.



Educational processes must be transformative in terms of preparing students to question existing gender relations and notions of masculinity and femininity.

School should therefore serve as space where students have opportunities for boys and girls to question, debate, see new perspectives, and form new identities and relations. Therefore, teachers role become critical. Teachers can play a crucial role in shaping the social relations between boys and girls inside and outside the classroom. They influence critically the reconstruction of gender relations and may work for the promotion of gender equality. While it is true that teachers erase all gender inequities that prevail in society, they can certainly achieve significant results in countering gender discrimination. They can do this by making a conscious effort to avoid gender inequities in the classroom. They can actively correct the bias and inequities in the methods of teaching, classroom management, resource allocation and division of labour. Here are a few things teachers should do consciously to avoid gender bias and to promote gender equality:

International Women's Day

International Women's Day is observed all over the world on 8th March every year. This day marks the struggle of women for equal treatment and opportunities for their development. It is also a day on which the men and women are once again reminded of their responsibility to create a gender just society. It is Clara Zetkin, a socialist leader from Germany, who was chiefly responsible for the observance of IWD. Do you observe this day in your school?

- Teachers should conduct themselves in a gender fair manner both inside and outside the classroom.
- They should consciously monitor their own conduct and the conduct of children to identify gender bias and discrimination in order to avoid such occurrences.
- They should avoid sexist bias in the use of their language. They must use gender-neutral language and encourage students also to do so.
- They should strive to promote integration of boys and girls in group work and in seating arrangements.
- Teachers may avoid assigning gendered jobs. For instance, teachers should avoid tendency to assign cleaning up tasks exclusively for girls and carrying and fixing jobs exclusively for boys. Mixed teams may be formed to carry out each task.
- Teachers should place equal expectations from boys and girls. Do not expect boys to do 'difficult' and 'rough' tasks and girls to do 'easy' and 'delicate' tasks. Teachers should make sure not to allow boys to play rougher sports while excluding girls from the competition. Teachers should discuss the expectations with the class and make it clear that gender will have no bearing on them.



- Teachers need to handle the curriculum in a gender-sensitive and gender-fair manner. Teachers should present themselves as role models in gender-fair conduct to both boys and girls.
- Teachers should be proactive in removing ‘gender gap in achievement’. This can be done by challenging notions of gender itself. They should not hesitate to take equitable measures to close the gender gaps.
- Teachers should not miss any opportunity to bring to discussion the instances of gender bias and discrimination and help children to challenge the stereotyping of boys and girls.
- Teachers should encourage girls to overcome their inhibition and to participate in classroom processes in equal measure. They should not be criticized unduly for wrong or incoherent answers.
- Leadership and other student responsibilities earn respect from peers and teachers and engender images of competence, self efficacy, and self esteem. Teachers should articulate the processes in such a way that the self-image and self-esteem of girls are strengthened in equal measure.
- Many girls do not feel comfortable, welcome, or entitled to access in all area of their schools, or to all instructional equipment. Restriction on movement and access to resources are strong lessons about power, control and expectations for equal treatment. Teachers have a responsibility to make girls as comfortable as boys in all activities of the school. Equal access to the full curriculum of a school is the right of every boy and girl.
- Girls of today and women of the future should prepare for as many career options as boys. Teachers have a role to play in the career development of girls.
- Verbal and physical harassment of girls by male students and teachers is a worldwide problem. Sexist comments, assaults, and threats often demean the girls and act as blocks to their free participation in schools activities. Teachers should ensure that equitable conditions prevail for the fullest participation of girls.
- Teachers have a major role in developing respect for the contribution and achievements of women to the social, economic and political progress of our country. Their contributions must be given due respect and recognition. Observance of International Women’s day, birthdays of women scientists and women leaders will go a long way in boosting the image of women in the minds of boys and girls.



Notes

**Check your progress**

1. There are some words given below. Convert them into appropriate gender inclusive words.

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.....

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Gender exclusive word	Gender inclusive word
Congressman	
Manpower Landlord Housewife	
Postman	
Sportsman	
Chairman	
Man made	
Cleaning lady	
Working men	

2. Answer the following questions by choosing the most appropriate response from among the given:
- Which one of the following promotes gender bias and inequality in a school setting?
 - stereotyping of male and female roles in textbooks
 - teaching practices that are biased against girls
 - school uniforms that are different for boys and girls
 - All of these
 - Which one of the following is free from language bias with respect to gender?
 - Manly look (b) femininely soft (c) girlish
 - humane
 - Which one of the following statements made by a teacher is NOT gender biased?
 - Being a girl, how can you be so untidy in your work?
 - After all he is boy. He can get away with it!



- (c) It is important for both boys and girls to do well in all subjects including mathematics.
 - (d) Boys will shift the furniture out of the room and then let girls clean up the room.
3. There is an element of sexism in the following statements. Identify the same and correct the statement to make it bias-free.
- (a) The chairman of the School Develop and Monitoring Committee addressed the parents.
 - (b) A scientist is interested in the study of nature. He tries to find the laws that govern the natural phenomenon.
 - (c) Plastic and cement are examples of man-made materials.
 - (d) Men work in fields and the women do cooking and take care of children.

11.5 LET US SUM UP

Sex is nature given and gender is made by society and culture. Gender discrimination can affect both men and women. However it is currently loaded heavily against women. The status of women can be gauged by a number of indicators which include levels of education, sex ratio, maternal mortality, female infant mortality, participation in the workforce, ownership of property and land, political participation and violence and crime against them. Gender bias and discrimination has a long history and what we see today is the cumulative distortions of the past. Gender discrimination can take various forms and operates through social institutions. Gender inequality affects the individuals, families, society, economy and progress of human kind. Gender inequality is changeable and should be changed. Teachers have a crucial role to play in gender reconstruction and social transformation.

11.6 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress in section 11.3

1. True or false

- a) False
- b) True
- c) True
- d) False



- e) True
- f) False

2. Gender attribute/Biological attribute

- a) Gender attribute
- b) Biological attribute
- c) Biological attribute
- d) Gender attribute
- e) Gender attribute
- f) Gender attribute
- g) Biological attribute
- h) Gender attribute
- i) Gender attribute
- j) Gender attribute
- k) Gender attribute

Check your progress in section 11.4

I. True or false

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. True
- 4. False
- 5. True
- 6. True
- 7. False
- 8. False

II. State whether the following is an instance of gender discrimination?

- 1. Act of gender discrimination
- 2. No gender discrimination
- 3. No gender discrimination



4. Act of gender discrimination
5. Act of gender discrimination
6. No gender discrimination
7. No gender discrimination
8. Act of gender discrimination

III. 1 - (b); 2 - (c); 3 - (d)

Check your progress in section 11.5

1. (c); 2. (a); 3. (b); 4. (d);
5. (d); 6. (b)

Check your progress in section 11.5

1. Congressman - Congressperson
Manpower - Human power
Landlord - Landholder
Housewife - Homemaker
Postman - Post-person
Sportsman - Sportsperson
Chairman - Chairperson
Manmade - Human made
Cleaning lady - Cleaning staff
Working men - Working people
2. (i) – d; (ii) – d; (iii) c
3. (a) The **chairperson** of the School Develop and Monitoring Committee addressed the parents.
(b) A scientist is interested in the study of nature. **He/she** tries to find the laws that govern the natural phenomenon.
(c) Plastic and cement are examples of materials made by **men and women**.
(d) The **men and women** in the family work in the fields and **together they** do cooking and take care of children.



11.7 PROJECT WORK AND QUESTIONS

1. Take a textbook that you are teaching. Identify, if any, the gender bias in the pictures, content and language. Prepare a brief report of your observations.
2. Pick up a news paper of any one day. Identify the gender bias in the contents, pictures and language. If you have a choice what change would you bring in the content and language?
3. Prepare a scrap book to depict the status of women in our society by taking pictures and headlines that appear in newspapers.
4. Collect slogans and quotations that question gender discrimination and promote gender equality.

11.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

1. Report of National Focus Group on Gender issues in education, NCERT, 2005
2. Gender Sensitivity: A training Manual, UNESCO, 2004
3. Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth, World Bank, 2004.
4. UNICEF - Girls' Education [www.unicef.org/girlseducation]
5. UNESCO Education for All [<http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/>]
6. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) [<http://www.ungei.org/>]
7. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, MHRD, Govt. of India [<http://ssa.nic.in/news/girls-education-in-india>]

11.9 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Distinguish between sex and gender.
2. Make a list of gender differences between boys and girls in your class. Develop an instructional strategy to suit both the groups.
3. What is gender discrimination? Give two examples.
4. Describe briefly the status of women in our society based on at least four indicators.
5. What are the main social constraints coming in way of universalization of primary education of girls?
6. Based on your experience as a teacher, list five ways in which gender problems can manifest themselves in a school setting. What can you do as a teacher to overcome them?



Notes

7. There are some situations which come in the way of free participation of girls in the activities of the school. Can you redeem these situations as a teacher in favour of the girls? How do you do that?
 - (a) The school has arranged an excursion for children. Some parents are not agreeing to send their daughters to the excursion.
 - (b) A girl is being bullied by her classmates.
 - (c) Girls studying in a school are allowed only indoor games.
 - (d) A few girls in your class are not doing well in mathematics.
 - (e) Some boys in the class are using foul language against girls.
8. List out some of the social practices prevailing in your state that are discriminatory against girls and women.
9. Describe briefly what would like to do to eliminate gender bias in your classroom?