

GENDER SENSITIZATION: NEED OF THE HOUR

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Abstract: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, says Simon De Beauvoir (1949). Indian Constitution has guaranteed economic, political and civil rights to women. But in reality an average Indian woman does not enjoy her rights, freedom and equality, in spite of constant efforts for better position in a family and Society. Ironically, even in the 21st century where the science and technology is at its peak, the woman is treated as inferior to man. This discrimination is because of the people who fail to understand the uniqueness of the other gender. At this juncture there is necessity to discuss and raise awareness on gender sensitization among the youngsters, who are the future and pride of India. The present paper focuses on developing awareness of gender sensitization among the students through Swarnakumari Debi’s novel, *The Uprooted Vine* which depicts Indian society, family and woman’s plight in patriarchy.

Key Words: Gender Discrimination. Constitution. Gender Sensitization. Novel. Woman Issues.

INTRODUCTION:

Telangana Government has grabbed the credit of being the first state in India to introduce a course called ‘Gender Sensitization’ and made it mandatory at graduation level. Interestingly JNTUH has taken initiation to implement the government order by conducting this course work for its second year, B .Tech and B.Pharm students. The paper carries three credit points and students have to score at least 40 per cent in both written and internal exams to get the pass marks. All most all the teachers, who involved with this is course work, are from the department of English irrespective of gender.

When the course work started, the in-charge of this course work found it difficult to get the right teachers to reach the learners. When the teachers entered the class room to introduce the course, students have exclaimed, ‘Teacher we don’t see any gender discrimination, girls are everywhere these days, our mothers and sisters are happy in our families.’! Saying this half of them has walked out of the class. Next class has witnessed only ten students, third class with activities has gone to fifteen students. Students could personalize neither the gender nor the text but the activity made to involve and personalize the content.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA:

Discrimination against woman begins even before her birth and flourishes in every phase of her life. The discrimination began with traditional value system has become deep rooted monster over the centuries, due to illiteracy, Hindu notions, and woman’s economic dependency. Indian society and family system believe that son is the redeemer only he has to enjoy the property of the father. However hard the daughters & women work both at home and outside the house, they are not allowed to enjoy the property, though women do have their stake in the property of their parents legally. Women, even in the twenty first century, do not have economic independence as they do not have freedom to work outside their family. This economic dependence on the male counterpart itself is a solid basis for gender inequality. The uneven distribution of rights and obligations within a household becomes conflict between women's new economic and old domestic roles in both rural and urban India. Women devote a large proportion of their time on unpaid long domestic sessions. Childbearing and rearing consumes major portion of their enthusiasm and energy, which is a major barrier for their career and progress. Not only men, but the elderly patriarchal women of the family try to construct their girls to be submissive. Even educated and earning women also impose Do’s and Don’ts on their daughters to be homely and acceptable in a patriarchal society.

When Education was introduced to Indian women in nineteenth century, male social reformers wanted girls to have an education, which make them to be perfect wives and mothers. This idea of woman education is very much alive even in the twenty first century Indian society. Parents often think that women education is an unnecessary financial burden and anyhow she will be married off and shifted to some other family. This orthodox

belief of parents is responsible for gender disparity, although many social activists and reformers carried their crusade against all social odds to restore honour and dignity of the women. Despite of many regulations for gender equality, even educated women in our society continues to be victims of exploitation, superstitions, patriarchal hegemony and social atrocities. Most of the women are unaware of their basic rights, potential and understanding of socio-economic and political construction of women. Instead accept all discriminatory practices that persist in our family and society due to their conditioned subordination, though our Indian constitution has guaranteed women the social, political and economic rights.

INDIAN CONSTITUTION:

Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures for positive discrimination in favour of women. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights for women. Best among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000): The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, both giving and taking dowry is crime. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is to keep up the self-respect women. Though Indian constitution provides equal rights and privileges for both men and women, it makes provisions to improve the status of women in democratic patriarchal society, majority of the Indian women still fail to enjoy the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them due to gender discrimination. This discrimination becomes a continuum unless women consciously deconstruct their mindset, role and place.

GENDER SENSITIZATION:

Gender sensitization is basic requirement for the overall growth of an individual. One cannot understand one's self, unless one is being sensitive to the needs of a particular gender, which means to have empathy for opposite sex. Sex is biological in origin while gender is culturally conditioned. *Gender sensitization can be the transformation of behavior by raising awareness of gender equality concerns, and instilling empathy in the views and notions about our own and the other gender.* It helps people to examine their personal attitudes and beliefs, and also question the 'realities' they knew. Urgency for this sensitivity has been felt and realized at all times and in almost all walks of humans all over India. But somehow in the recent times, a much stronger need is felt and realized after various incidents like gang rapes and girl students' suicide due to ragging on the campuses. And there is an urgent need to talk and discuss about this sensitive topic both at home and on the campuses.

One has to understand that irrespective of gender categorizations, humans experience the same range of emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, and frustration, and also equally have ambitions, dreams, and desire for noble and content life. Boys may cry and makeup themselves beautifully, girls may walk on the roads in the nights and establish companies, and the Others may love to play, cry, challenge the world with their potential. It's nothing to do with their gender rather with interest and determination. Expecting, third gender, men and women to carry out gender specific roles, is the loophole in Indian society's great culture. Man in patriarchy, deliberately wants to be superior to woman by providing her needs, and this leads to his depression and frustration. Woman is being forced to take up the domestic work in spite of her potential to be an employer or a leader. Mercilessly, today women are expected to do both domestic and official work at a stretch without any assistance, which is modern women's unavoidable burden. Even in the twenty first century Indian patriarchy sympathizes with rapists saying, girls must be within their limits. In this scenario we ought to be more alert and sensitive to challenge those mindsets that are damaging ours and others identity and existence. This is why we need gender sensitization to sensitize both men and women about these crippling notions.

NEED OF THE HOUR:

The problems directly or indirectly related to the lack of gender sensitivity, be it the case of eve-teasing, domestic violence or brutal rape. But the truth is, whatever has percolated in young minds has been given to them by their socio-cultural environment which mainly includes their family, educational institutions and peers. Now the major part of the responsibility for developing gender sensitization rests on the shoulders of family members and

educational institutions. They are the ones who can kindle the gender equality in young girls and boys and develop empathy for each other. It's time to stop shedding tears passively for the injustice done to women, but to act smartly for women's dignity, equal opportunity and empowerment so that they may play a major role in building discrimination free nation. These Empowered women contribute for the development of a family, community, society and a generation. Educational institutions, classroom, students and teachers are part of society, it may have various problems such as poverty, gender discrimination, oppression, inequalities, other biases and various other issues. Hence classroom becomes the microcosm of a society, and we cannot ignore the reality of gender discrimination there. Gender sensitization within a classroom is a practical tool for analyzing gender relations. It also provides adequate information regarding major factors that influence and also responsible for maintaining or changing the structure of gender relations within a family and society. It also becomes a platform which aims at awareness, knowledge, skill and behaviour in gender relations. In order to make students more sensible professionals, from the beginning they should be sensitized about gender by introducing them to our Indian Writings in English. When the students are exposed to the representational literature, especially to the novels, they can have an overview of the culture, construction of gender and traditions of our native land. Classroom bears a huge responsibility, when the students grow as respectable humans and citizens, by inculcating respect among the sexes and genders. Shaping the personality of the students, gender sensitization is the need of the hour and Literature will play a pivotal role in this direction, if it is familiarized to students on the right time.

NOVEL:

English Novel has its roots in India with the introduction of English education during British rule in nineteenth century. Even the Indian women writing in English also began in nineteenth century as the result of Social reformations, which depicted the reality. "has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad."(1986). 19th century authors dealt with significant social matters, the idea of responsibility became a key issue of the writers and characters of the modern novel. The legal and social treatment of married women has been often discussed as a political issue of the 19th century Indian novels.

Literature, particularly the novel; can focus on the surface of society, showcasing the hidden constructions by detecting the fundamental trends which may lead to the revolutionary transformation. Literature is a powerful weapon in the education of masses. The social changes are possible through literary works. It is impossible to change the orthodox, traditional concepts of religion, gender and class-division. It is impossible to change the social inequality and establish equality by revolution. It is possible only through literature – to make sufferers aware in the system and to make those who are responsible for inequality conscious.

Novel is 'an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting' (Britannica 2014) It helps to understand the psychological stress and attitude of the mind, historical truths and philosophy of life, innate and inborn goodness of man. Novel also broadens student's horizons by giving them knowledge of the literature and improves general cultural awareness, creativity and literary imagination. Novel always exhibits the required changes in individual, society and even in history.

Women writings openly address political and social issues. Swarnakumari Debi's novel *The Uprooted Vine* occupies an important place in Indian Women Writings and serves as valuable document of Indian history of nineteenth century. Its themes like child marriage, woman education, plight of Indian Hindu widow and child widow and women economic dependency, Indian society and its culture, superstitions and notions. This novel showcases Indian women struggle as daughters, daughter in-laws, widows, and poor dependents in the joint family who were deprived of their rights, exploited as domestic drudges and marginalized to the extent of being denied shelter and maintenance in patriarchal system. It also depicts Indian Women's political, economic condition and complexity of man and woman relationships within a family and outside society.

The Uprooted Vine is the best supporting material to sensitize students about gender and gender discrimination. As Duff and Maley (2007) propose 'Easy tasks to stimulate the interest of students, one should proceed gradually from easy tasks to difficult tasks'. When the students go through the given material, which is a reader friendly text. Teacher can completely exploit the material by conducting brainstorming sessions, pre-reading tasks etc., for

the benefit of students. This novel can be best used to teach graduates the meaning and usage of the strange words the learner come across, like gender, patriarchy, liberty, equality, feminism, matriarchy and culture etc. it helps the students to know about woman education, her construction, her psyche, and suppression in a patriarchal society, from the characters of the novel. Uprooted Vine's setting itself makes the students easily identify their families, with the story setting, and of domestic work of women and their gossips, religious rituals, festivals and power games, which represent a typical Indian family and society. A teacher can exploit the entire text, scenes, character's behaviour, and dialogues to make the young brains understand women's oppression through the ages.

From men characters **Charu** and **Kishori** who were patriarchal hypocrites and want to be modern for pleasure and traditional to inherit the property, learners can be exposed to Indian patriarchal society. How it is designed to benefit men rather than women, and how privileged men's desires can be fulfilled without the consent of women, where sex is believed to be a pleasure for man and sacred act for woman. Boys are asked to speak and do anything and everything, reversely family and society finds fault with girls. Girls are never given equal opportunity and support to show their true potential instead conditioned to be subordinate.

Women characters of the novel help the teacher to bring awareness among girls regarding psychological and social changes at various phases of woman's life. They can learn about domestic violence and sexual abuse so that they counter back these challenges wisely looking at various characters from the novel. Looking at the character Snehalatha, who is an orphan and child widow is driven to suicide by the callous behaviour of her own and husband's family. Jiban's mother another widow, turned out of the family to prevent her from claiming a share of the family property. Kamala dies at young age due to family's negligence and injustice, other women characters like Jagat Babu's wife and daughter were jealous of Snehalatha and tortured her to death because they want to have power over their men folk otherwise as women they were empathizing with Sneha's plight. All the women bond strongly as fellow sufferers under patriarchal oppression.

Jethima was the only character wields great power in the joint family as the heir of her husband, although she was a childless widow, men folk respected her decisions. Jethima as woman or childless widow was not respected, but Jethima as a property holder was respected. Characters like Sneha and Jiban's mother in this novel provides the teacher matter, place and scope to discuss and educate the learners, about women's basic rights like 'Awareness on Legal Rights of women such as free legal aid, Right to privacy while recording statement, No arrest after sunset, Protection of employee's identity & Employer must protect the employee', and about fundamental, economic, political rights. It also helps the learner to understand Gendered assumptions and gender-based social discriminations that exist throughout society, from organizational planning to the everyday interactions at home and the workplace.

Characters of the story very much represent all sorts of personalities in a classroom and any family that makes the students identify themselves and their mothers, sisters and women of the family with the characters' characterization. Men characters like Jiban and Jagat Babu were educated and good hearted people were taken for granted by their wives, as they fail to understand woman construction in a patriarchy. From fictional characters students can learn where to stand in a society with self-respect character. This empowering education would nurture boys more rational and sensible citizens regarding our social and moral etiquettes. In order to change the under developed situation, along with economic growth social progress is also greatly required. Hence the need of the hour is to sensitize all the three genders about gender discrimination and further establish a progressive world where every gender respects the other gender and its significance.

This would not only make the students duty conscious, but also protective and caring towards other genders. Boys should be sensitized to empathize with girl issues and also accept the girls as their equals. Girls should also be trained to care for their male classmates without losing their self-esteem. Gender equality is not just a woman's issue or a man's issue, rather it is the responsibility of all the three sexes to work towards a more balanced society where individuals are free to be who they are, without being stereotyped, harassed or judged rather accepted with solidarity.

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