

Curriculum and gender Equality :

With regard to the formal education system, the curriculum can be described as formal and hidden curriculum. Formal Curriculum, refers to the individual academic subjects while the Hidden Curriculum, is a set of values, attitudes and norms that are implicitly conveyed to students by teachers' actions and by the organisational processes operating inside the classroom and the school environment.

The content and the process of education found significant space even in **the Millennium Development Goals Report 2005** which recognised that the textbooks could reinforce gender stereotypes by casting women in subordinate roles. Teaching methods and classroom transactions have gender biases, with boys getting more attention and affirmation from teachers than girls (UNDP, 2005).

Now we have moved to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to be achieved by 2030, SDGs 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) focus on gender equality. It supports the development of curriculum and textbooks free from stereotypes and discrimination since gender bias in textbooks can affect children's self-esteem, lower their engagement in schools and limit their expectations about their future opportunities, including career options. In this paper, the focus will be on the formal aspects of the curriculum, specifically the role of textbooks in gender socialization of young children.

The formal curriculum is a strong tool to transmit and transform the culture, values and beliefs of society to the learner. The formal

curriculum is implemented through the textbooks and learning material.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) document recognized that: ***“We must use text books as one of the primary instruments for equality, since for a great majority of school going children, as also for teachers, it is the only accessible and affordable resource for education”***.

The bias and stereotypical gender role portrayal in the textbooks used to impart the lessons of the curriculum cannot be ignored.

Research has shown that ***“students spend as much as 80 to 95 per cent of classroom time using textbooks and teachers make a majority of their instructional decision based on the textbook” (Sadker and Zittleman, 2007)***.

Since every society has its gender belief system and gender stereotypes, the same images of men and women are reflected and portrayed

in their formal curriculum. When children enter the school environment, the images of male and female portrayed in books, shape their concept about gender and consequently their own self image, their behaviour, their aspirations and their expectations. If any change in the gender stereotypes is planned, serious and concerted efforts are required, firstly to analyse the learning material and secondly, to present those desired modified images (Mirza, 2006). The concern for incorporating women's issues in the syllabus and textual material was given emphasis at the first National Conference on Women's Studies (NCWS) in 1981.

Review of curricula in different disciplines undertaken by the NCWS highlighted the absence of women/girls in the curricula. Since then there has been a serious concern for incorporating women's issues, experiences and contributions visibly in the curriculum.

Textual materials prepared in the Indian context attempt to depict girls and women through visuals and content, aimed at building a positive image of women's contribution in different spheres. However, studies conducted by the Department of Women's Studies in the 1990's showed that a partial approach of inclusion of women in different disciplines was adopted. Stereotypes were visible in depicting women's contributions.

The National policy on Education, 1986, emphasized on the re orientation of the National education system to play, "A positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women (and) the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administration (as) an act of faith an social engineering."

Some of the curricular choices based on gender are-

- All over the world, boys and girls take up different fields and subjects of study.
- Generally, girls prefer to take up subjects which are more useful in day to day life.
- It is generally believed that mathematics is a subject for boys and most of the girls thus develop a fear for the subject.
- Girls tend to go for humanities and languages as these subjects are normally associated with femininity.
- Boys and girls pick up different subjects in practical and vocational field. Boys take up subjects like agriculture, wood -work, metal work etc. whereas girls are offered works related to domestic sphere like sewing, embroidery, painting, typing etc.
- As there is a general notion that girls are physically weaker than boys, they are restricted to choose subjects like physical education and sports.