Gender Sensitisation

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GENDER SENSITISATION
(As per New CBCS Syllabus Common for All B.A./B.Sc./BBA/B.Com. (All Groups) of All the Universities in Telangana State w.e.f. 2016-17)

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We are surrounded by gender lore from the time we are very small. It is ever-present in conversation, humor and conflict, and it is called upon to explain everything from driving styles to food preferences. Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact. As scholars and researchers, though, it is our job to look beyond what appears to be common sense to find not simply what truth might be behind it, but how it came to be common sense. It is precisely because gender seems natural, and beliefs about gender seem to be obvious truths, that we need to step back and examine gender from a new perspective.

Doing this requires that we suspend what we are used to and what feels comfortable, and question some of our most fundamental beliefs. This is not easy, for gender is so central to our understanding of ourselves and of the world that it is difficult to pull back and examine it from new perspectives. But it is precisely the fact that gender seems self-evident that makes the study of gender interesting. It brings the challenge to uncover the process of construction that creates what we have so long thought of as natural and inexorable – to study gender not as given, but as an accomplishment; not simply as cause, but as effect; and not just as individual, but as social. The results of failure to recognize this challenge are manifested not only in the popular media, but in academic work on language and gender as well. As a result, gender sensitisation is considered as an abstract concept to realise and support existing beliefs to promote more reflective thinking.

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We need a valuable feedback from the readers. We will acknowledge your suggestions and try to incorporate them in the future editions of the book.

Authors
Gender Sensitisation

AECC – 2 (2 Hours/Week)  
Credits – 2

UNIT I: Gender – An Overview (30 Hours)
2. Gender Spectrum: Biological, Sociological, Psychological Conditioning.
3. Gender-based Division of Labour – Domestic Work and Use Value.

UNIT II: Gender – Contemporary Perspectives (15 Hours)
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2. Gender: Constitutional and legal Perspectives
3. Media and Gender
4. Gender: Emerging Issues and Challenges
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1. Nature and Evolution of Gender

Objectives

- To improve delivery of public service by coordinating Government Ministries, Independent Departments and Other Agencies
- To achieve unity of purpose and direction in the process of integrating gender concerns

Gender is used to describe those characteristics of men and women which are socially determined, in contrast to those which are biologically determined. The word ‘gender’ was used by Ann Oakley and others in the 1970s to emphasize that everything women and men do, and everything expected of them, with the exception of their sexually distinct functions (childbearing, etc.) can change, and does change, over time and according to changing and varied social, economical, political and cultural factors.
People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught the behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities which are appropriate for them, and how they should relate to other people.

This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity, and determines gender roles and responsibilities. Gender roles vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social, political and economic group to another within the same culture.

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a growing consensus that sustainable development requires an understanding of both women’s and men’s roles and responsibilities within the community and their relations to each other.

This has come to be known as the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. The main objective of GAD is mainstreaming women’s needs and perspectives into all activities. Mainstreaming acknowledges that all development operations have a gender impact and do not automatically benefit men and women equally. Thus, it is necessary to adopt GAD approach for development programmes to benefit both men and women and also for sustainable development and positive impacts on the society as whole.

Although ‘gender and development’ includes both women and men, however, in most cases focus is given to only women. It is because of imbalance and unequal status of women in most of the societies where women do not have the same opportunities and personal freedom as men do. Therefore, there is a need to focus women compared to men. It is like two glasses, where one is half full and another is empty, thus the empty glass should get water first and when both glasses become equal, then fill both. If someone tries to fill both glasses without noticing the level of water, it won’t work.

**Gender sensitization** refers to the modification of behaviour by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. This can be achieved by conducting various sensitization campaigns, workshop, programmes, etc. Sensitization in the domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, is seen an awareness informed propensity or disposition which aims at changing behaviour so that it is sensitive to certain issues. Gender sensitization may be seen as “the awareness, informed
disposition or propensity to behave in a manner which is sensitive to gender justice and equality issues.”

It is interlinked with gender empowerment. Gender sensitization theories claim that modification of the behaviour of teachers and parents (etc.) towards children can have a causal effect on gender equality. Gender sensitizing “is about changing behaviour and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other genders.” It helps people in “examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the ‘realities’ they thought they know.”

Gender sensitization refer to mental process of an individual when he or she comes in contact with individual of opposite sex. The thought process of an individual is always different for each gender. Gender sensitization evokes a mixed reaction in the mind depending where you are from ‘cities’ or ‘villages’. The city bred youth think that girls are being given more than their due and from the village, they are so insensitive to the need of a girl child that it is natural for them to think that a girl is subservient to a boy.

The significance of gender sensitizing, gender equality to the development is widely recognized globally accounting the various efforts by governments, civil society and developing agencies in the holistic development. Gender consists of whatever traits a group considers proper for its males and females. Gender stratification means males’ and females’ unequal access to the power, prestige and property on the basis of sex. No matter what we attain in life, we are labeled as male or female. These labels carry images and expectations about how we should act. From birth right till death, gender has a hand in shaping feelings, thoughts and actions. Children quickly learn that society defines males and females as different kinds of people by the age of three. Gender affects how we think of ourselves, also it teaches us to act in a normative way. Gender roles are attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex.

This is the literal meaning of ‘gender’ and ‘sensitize’ as per dictionary. But probing into the happenings of today, the meaning of ‘Gender Sensitization’ is about changing behaviour and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and other sex. It helps people in examining their personal...
attitudes and beliefs questioning the realities they thought and know when the society tries to adopt something new, there is every possibility that it has to pass through number of pangs and plights.

In the changing scenario of the modern world, where men and women work together and interact in the professional, social and the domestic front, gender equality is an essential criterion to be observed by responsible human beings. Gender sensitization is about making people aware of the need to bring about a quantum change in our mindset, which sees man as the breadwinner and woman as the housekeeper. The home-bound woman of yesteryears has metamorphosed into the smart, dynamic, modern woman who is adept at balancing her professional and domestic lives. She has successfully carved a niche for herself in the scheme of things.

Concerns about culture are frequently raised in relation to initiatives for gender equality in development cooperation. In some cases, program officers or partners are concerned that promotion of gender equality would “interfere with local culture”, and therefore feel that gender equality should not be promoted for ethical reasons. In other cases, the cultural values of a particular area are described as a major constraint on efforts for gender equality, and therefore action is considered to be difficult for practical reasons.

CULTURE

“Culture” is often used in intellectual and creative products, including literature, music, drama and painting. In other words, “culture” is described in the beliefs and practices of another society, particularly where these are seen as closely linked with tradition or religion. But culture is more than that. Culture is a part of every developmental fabric of the society, including our own. It shapes “the way things are done” and our understanding of why this should be so. This more comprehensive approach is proposed in the definition of culture adopted at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mexico, 1982) and used in ongoing discussions on culture and development:

“Culture... is... the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group.
It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relations between women and men – in other words, gender – are shaped by culture. Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family, but also in the wider community and the workplace.

Gender (like race or ethnicity) functions as an organizing principle for society because of the cultural meanings even to being male or female. This is evident in the division of labour according to gender. In most societies, there are clear patterns of “women’s work” and “men’s work,” both in the household and in the wider community – and cultural explanations of why this should be so. The patterns and the explanations differ among societies and change over time.

While the specific nature of gender relations varies among societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. This pattern of disparity based on gender is both a human rights and a development issue.

Societies and cultures are not static. They are living entities that are continually being renewed and reshaped. As with culture more generally, gender definitions change over time. Change is shaped by many factors. Cultural change occurs as communities and households respond to social and economic shifts associated with globalization, new technologies, environmental pressures, armed conflict, development projects, etc. For example, in Bangladesh, changes in trade policies allowed for the growth of the garment industry, which drew large numbers of women into the urban labour force. This process has involved a reinterpretation of the norms of purdah (female seclusion) by the women entering this employment and by their families. The much greater visibility of women in cities such as Dhaka is also influencing public perceptions of possible female roles in the family and the workplace. Change also results from deliberate efforts to influence values through changes in the law or government policy, often due to pressure from civil society. There
are many examples of efforts to influence attitudes about race relations, the rights of workers and the use of the environment, to name three areas in which cultural values shape behaviour. Efforts to reshape values about women and gender relations have focused on concerns such as the number of girls sent to school, women’s access to paid work, and public attitudes to domestic violence. New cultural definitions are formed through a process in which some segments of society promote change through advocacy and example, while others resist it. In other words, societies are not homogeneous and no assumptions can be made about a consensus on “cultural values.”

As suggested in the point above, cultural values are continually being reinterpreted in response to new needs and conditions. Some values are reaffirmed in this process, while others are challenged as no longer appropriate. A member of the Cambodian government uses a vivid image when describing the need to question the cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality. She says the aim is not to overturn the cultural identity of the nation, but to focus on the elements within it. “There is a Cambodian saying that men are a piece of gold, and women are a piece of cloth. The piece of gold, when it is dropped in mud, is still a piece of gold. But a piece of cloth, once it’s stained, it’s stained forever. If you are a prostitute, if you have been raped, if you are a widow, you are no longer that virginal piece of cloth. But men, whether they are criminal or have cheated on their wives, they are still a piece of gold. When there is such a saying, a perception, then there is something wrong with that culture and that’s when you want to change it.”

We noted that gender identities and gender relations are its culture because they shape daily life. Changes in gender relations are often highly contested, in part because they have immediate implications for everyone, women and men. This immediacy also means that gender roles – and particularly women’s roles as wives and mothers – can be potent symbols of cultural change or cultural continuity. The political potential of such symbols is evident in the ways that religious and political movements have focused on women’s roles. This has served to highlight adherence to religious or cultural values – and resistance to “western” influences. In such contexts, internal efforts for change become even more complex as those advocating change can easily be dismissed as unpatriotic, irreligious, or tainted by the west. However, religious beliefs and
national identity are also important to women. This is evident in the efforts by different groups of women to review interpretations of religious texts and to reaffirm values and traditions that support freedom and dignity for women.

This example reinforces two points made earlier: that cultural values are constantly evolving rather than fixed and that there are different interests intervening in the process. Views about the role of women and about gender equality that are held by one person or group will not necessarily be held by others (and views will differ among women as well as among men). A balanced assessment of the potential for gender equality initiatives requires consultations with a range of actors, including those working for equality. Post-soviet countries provide another example. There the rhetoric of gender equality is associated with the propaganda of the soviet period. Those women are “free to be women” – free of the requirement to be in the labour force – has been referred to as a benefit of the transition by politicians and officials. Women’s organizations have noted that this serves to justify discrimination against women when there are too few jobs for all. Such organizations have been struggling to gain recognition from male-dominated political and bureaucratic structures that women want (and need) to participate in the labour market and to maintain their human rights.

DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES

Development is about change. Development initiatives (by governments, NGOs or development agencies) are investments in promoting social and economic change. Some development initiatives aim to change values and practices that shape social relations – consider, for example, the investments made in family planning and what this implies about family structures. Development models also incorporate cultural values – consider, for example, the concern with the transition to market economies, and the support for private property as a cultural value.

Other types of initiatives less obviously concerned with culture nevertheless have impacts on the social relations that characterize a culture. Consider, for example, the possible impacts of an improved road network linking rural and urban areas. New roads allow greater mobility of people and goods. Many
villagers could benefit from better access to markets for farm products, to health services and to schools for their children. Others may not, for example, those producing a product such as clay pots that must now compete with cheaper and more durable plastic products. The roads could lead to an increase in rural-urban migration. This could result in more households where men are absent and women take charge of farms and families or (depending on the region) women leaving villages for employment in urban areas.

Isn’t Cultural Sensitivity Important?

It is of course important to be culturally sensitive. It is, of course, important to be culturally sensitive. But respect for other cultures is not merely uncritical acceptance when culture, tradition or religion is invoked. We would not accept culture or tradition as a rationale for discrimination against an ethnic group – rather we would look for opportunities to counteract prejudice and its consequences. In relation to issues of women’s position and gender equality, cultural sensitivity and respect would be better demonstrated by:

(A) Adherence to the values of equality and women’s rights espoused by the international community. These are important human rights commitments made by both Canada and partner countries that are undermined by the assumption that cultural values take precedence when they do not coincide with human rights norms.

(B) Recognition that any society includes different views and interests on gender relations. The assumption that cultural values are static ignores the process of conflict and change underway in any culture. It also disregards the efforts of women (and men) in that society who are questioning cultural values and working towards equality.

(C) Recognition that decisions about what aspects of culture and tradition to protect are not for outsiders to make. Assuming a role in protecting cultures from changes in gender relations is an outside imposition, as much as the imposition of change based on our own cultural values. A more respectful approach is to consult with women and equality advocates to learn how they are defining issues and what they see as potential ways forward.
Strategies that support women’s empowerment can contribute to women’s ability to formulate and advocate their own visions for their society – including interpretations and changes to cultural and gender norms. CIDA’s *Policy on Gender Equality* emphasizes the importance of women’s empowerment to the achievement of gender equality. It provides a definition of empowerment and indicates a role for development. “Empowerment is about people – both women and men – taking control of their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance….

“Outsiders cannot empower women: only women can empower themselves to make choices or speak out on their own behalf. However, institutions, including international cooperation agencies, can support processes that increase women’s self-confidence, develop their self-reliance, and help them set their own agendas.”

UNDP’s 1995 *Human Development Report*, in making the case for an “engendered approach,” highlights the importance of women’s empowerment to social and cultural change. “The engendered development model, though aiming to widen choices for both men and women, should not predetermine how different cultures and different societies exercise these choices. What is important is that equal opportunities to make a choice exist for both women and men.”

Although this is often overlooked, gender is an aspect of the social identity of men as well as women. Just as there are cultural norms and expectations about women’s roles, there are also cultural norms and expectations of men as leaders, husbands, sons and lovers that shape their behaviour and opportunities. Aspects of gender expectations may have costs and disadvantages for men (the expectation that they will take up arms and the defense of the nation, for example). However, the overall pattern of gender relations favors men in the distribution of resources, opportunities and power. Men’s privileged position also gives them disproportionate power in determining the values that prevail.

To date, the struggle for increased equality between women and men has been led by women. Recent developments include the formation of men’s
networks for gender equality and the “white ribbon” campaigns initiated by men in Canada and other countries such as Nicaragua against domestic violence. These are promising signs as the achievement of gender equality will require the participation of men as well as women.

Development agencies are beginning to realize the importance of involving men in initiatives for gender equality. In some cases, this has been motivated by resistance from men when they were not informed of the wider benefits of women-specific initiatives. Other initiatives pursue the more ambitious objective of engaging men in promoting equality. Certain initiatives related to reproductive health have been particularly innovative in involving men in exploring the links between inequality and the well-being of families and communities.

The question is not whether we intervene in local culture, but how. For all development initiatives, the challenge is to gain a better understanding of the context and in particular to:

(a) identify opportunities for positive steps in support of gender equality;

(b) be informed about and work in cooperation with change efforts by governments and civil society organizations in partner countries. These challenges are particularly relevant to initiatives that do not focus specifically on women’s rights and gender equality. Most development resources are directed to sectors such as education, health, infrastructure, or to issues such as economic reform, poverty reduction, or capacity development. Given that such initiatives account for most development investment, they will also account for most of the impact on people – and the impacts, both intended and unintended, on culture and on gender equality.

**Build on a Gender Analysis**

A gender analysis is required for all initiatives as it ensures that planning is based on facts and analysis rather than assumptions. Gender analysis has been advocated for over 20 years because of findings that projects can fail due to lack of information about basic cultural patterns such as the division of labour by
gender within households and about the rewards and incentives associated with the division of labour. A gender analysis is, therefore, a means of increasing the quality and effectiveness of initiatives as well as supporting gender equality.

A gender analysis should provide information and analysis about the families and communities that will be targeted or affected by an initiative – about activities, needs and priorities, whether and how these differ by gender, and the implications for the proposed initiative. It should identify local and national initiatives for gender equality – the efforts by governments and civil society to pursue these issues, and how the initiative can complement these efforts. A gender analysis is the basis for planning an initiative that has realistic objectives and activities related to gender equality.