

Bridging the Gender Gap and Skilling for the Future through Undergraduate Education in India .

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Abstract : In order to meaningfully change gender bias and discrimination in society, a paradigm shift needs to be taken from an activist, reactionary stance towards a harmonious and integrated approach which is based on a more liberal and human and which recognizes the complex play of social, cultural, economic , religious forces to fabricate the layers of identity which people take on.

Education can be a force multiplier because it brings together multiple stakeholders on a common platform. Specifically intervention at the undergraduate level can have great impact because of its positional advantage in the Indian Education System.

Last but not the least, jobs of the future requires a new skill set. New skills too require a preparatory course in order to have a tangible impact.

The paper highlights some key strategies and interventions that can be adopted at the undergraduate level.

Significance: The UN has recently articulated 50 Sustainable Development Goals out of which the fifth goal is on gender parity. Also in India, the Skill India Initiative has been launched which will impart a new skill set to millions of Indians to cope with the Jobs of the future. The paper will be important to policy makers who wish to incorporate skills and change mindsets through education.

Nature: Conceptual

Key Words: gender, integrated, complex, undergraduate, impact, skills, strategies.

Through Time immemorial, our society has been grappling with gender issues. Every time, we take one step forward towards gender equality, the results take us many steps backwards.

Instances of rape, female foeticide, domestic violence, dowry deaths, malnutrition in female children, denial of education for the girl child, treatment of widows, honour killings, unequal pay for equal work, glass ceiling are some of the atrocities faced by girls and women across cultures.

Lurking paedophiles, being macho, expectations of being the bread winner, being labelled as womanly if emotions are exhibited, exploitation of rules by vindictive women, being coerced in choosing careers that are manly are some of the atrocities faced by boys and men across cultures.

So we continue with the forward and backward march because we are approaching the problem with the mindset of We vs. Them which reeks of confrontation and is a breeding ground for another conflict. We need to focus on solutions which are collaborative, reconciling and harmonious.

Equality could be another form of social violence. Rather than force fitting equality, we need to be firstly sensitive to individual expression of masculinity or femininity and appreciate their differences.

Men and women per se are different creatures, and originally were differently abled to perform different roles so that by their unique contribution, the human species could evolve dynamically.

However, complex socio cultural, biological, ethical moral and political compulsions have changed the narrative completely and has resulted in not what can be termed as progress but its distinctly distorted version.

Before we can understand the subtle yet powerful forces at play, it is pertinent to understand the masculine and feminine qualities as best as we can which is difficult because currently we tend to view everything around us with the tinted masculine lens.

The central idea of human evolution is and will be governed by natural laws which are oriented towards the continuation of the species. Hence like the rest of the creatures the human species has a male and a female. The male carries the seeds of the next generations and the female nurtures the seed, nourishes it and enables it to grow. For this basic and essential role, men by nature have acquired **more of** certain traits like aggression,

competitiveness, protectiveness etc which are termed as masculine and on the other hand, women who have to nurture another life inside of them for nearly a year have **more of** the feminine traits of patience, compassion, intuition.

Basically masculine traits flow outward into the world and the feminine traits are opposite, the energies turn inwards.

However, nature balanced the game evenly for both.

If one provided the other protected.

If one fought battles for survival, the other provided the emotional strength and sustenance to go through it

If one competed for resources to keep the flock going, the other collaborated for building meaningful relationships.

If one was temperamentally stable, the other provided the mystic charm of uncertainties and mood swings.

The natural system rewarded both handsomely, the providers were accorded social influence which resulted in power and the other was rewarded with incredible inner strength, beauty and grace.

The system was designed to be balanced, harmonious and to synergistically deliver meaningful growth and prosperity to society.

But, the power sharing equation, myths, stories, propaganda, religion etc influence the way people behave in groups.

And now the external power that the masculine way acquired has completely taken over the world and consequence is for all to see.

Both males and females have masculine and feminine traits. The mysterious alchemy between these traits profoundly shapes our inner thoughts and aspirations and social norms help to manifest them.

We all seek what is valued most by our tribe or society. If society values aggression, money, influence, position, we all hanker for the same.

As a society we no longer value the quintessential feminine, the subtle yet powerful, collaborative, nurturing qualities and above all the ability to give a rich meaning to the external world that we create.

We are all obsessed with the masculine acquisition; we have tilted the balance completely and are now having to deal with grotesque manifestation of both the feminine and the masculine.

Here are a few such examples:

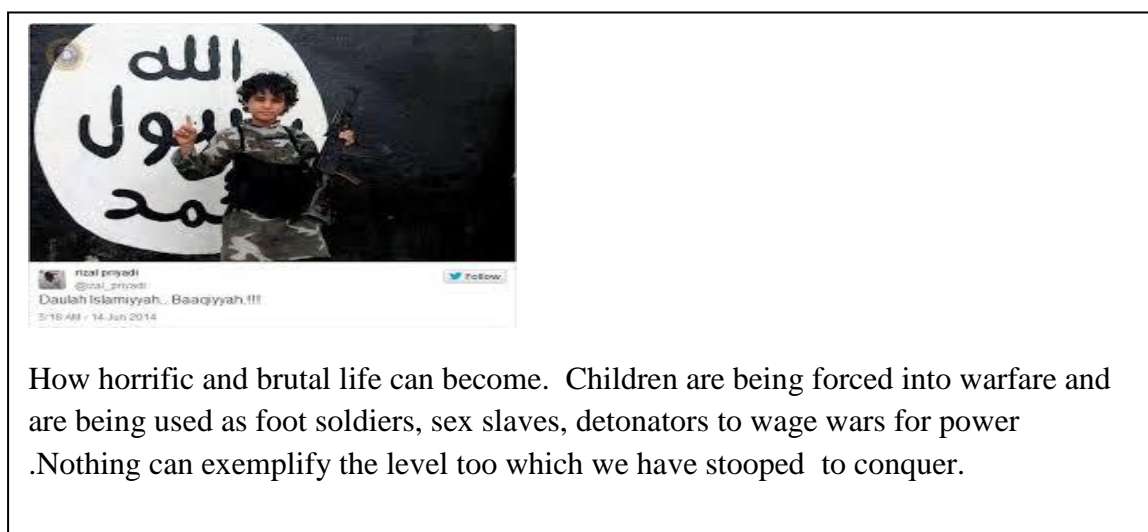


This face represents the complete distortion of the feminine way. Tashfeen Malik, left her six-month baby in the care of her old mother-in-law, put on an armour suit, took hold of a weapon and shot at innocent people who were on a holiday party in San Bernardino, California and along with her husband mercilessly massacred 14 people. It's hard to imagine how she must have completely murdered or killed her own feminine nature to take on the extreme brutal way.

Another example :



And Another :





The masculine obsession , makes women take to female foeticide. This is a baby who has been brutally killed **not by men but by women themselves** as midwives, nurses, mothers, doctors .

Women in India pray to Gods to **be blessed** so that they can give birth to **baby boys**.

We first have to acknowledge that masculine and feminine principles go hand in hand in co creating a meaningful world. By meaningful is meant the ability to cherish life, to make a contribution to the betterment of life for oneself and for others. Every contribution cannot be monetized and included in a nationsGDP Even Aristotle mentions that the virtues are the golden means between excesses. The ancient concept Chinese philosophy of the Yin and Yang Or the Ancient Indian Philosophy of Purush and Prakriti are based on the principles of masculine and feminine, **and how two contradictory and opposing forces create a meaningful whole.**





Amongst other things, a balance between the two energies leads to a well integrated dynamic and effective human being which in turn leads to harmonious society.

If the masculine principles are allowed to be dominant, the result is the male psyche which is angry, fearful, intimidated and above all will not value his own life. On the other hand a dominant feminine could result in a female psyche of sabotaging, greed, withholding, interfering, victim and last but not the least will place low value on lives of others.

It is indeed ironic that we are still talking about gender issues in the 21st Century when we claim to have made phenomenal advancement. Is this not an irony by itself and is pointing towards completely new way of thinking, a deep reflection on the values we have as people and our way of thinking.

How do we define our modernity when we still violently insist on brutal social conformity? Distorted narratives, confusion and misplaced ideas cannot help in finding lasting and organic solutions.

This stereotyping of men and women stifles blossoming of both. The problem could lie in our perception. We only tend to consider the physical attributes of men and women as being indicative of gender.

Based on social conditioning, and gender biases society encourages certain traits to flourish and certain others to be repressed. This social stereotyping results in stunted development or repressed traits that find an outlet or a means of expression. Sometimes these outlets could be creative, like poetry, acting, theatre, designing. Not all are fortunate in finding creative expression, many repressed traits can be manifested in destructive ways like physical abuse, substance abuse, violence, rape, terrorism etc.

This distortion of individual expression distorts societies and the world and results in what we are witnessing around us.

The external world around is now dangerous, hostile, depleted. Our internal world is also dreary, joyless, mechanical, selfish and meaningless.

The key to rebuilding a sustainable life is to understand the integration of masculine and feminine. To respect both. To understand the differences between the two and so that we integrate the two to co create a meaningful world.

Education can be a key enabler in causing the shift by sensitizing gender roles and capacities.

But before we take the role of education, it is required to reflect on the same. How should we define the distinguishing features of a robust education system in a world that is at war with itself? The end product of our education is again a job. Our system is dictated by the job market. Education is only then a commercial investment which tends to pay off by a lucrative job offer.

Even if we were to give in to the commercial demands that are placed on education, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that the jobs of the future will require a different skill set.

Most jobs that we know of today are projected to get automated.

The jobs of the future will be collaborative, innovative, rendering complex services, will deal with doing more with much lesser, will deal with conserving, with rectifying the excesses of the past generations in short more feminine than ever before.

So to see education as an enabler for delivering sustainable goals, of which gender issues are centre stage, we need a quantum shift from the masculine way of thinking which are reflected in the importance we tend to give to marks, to subjects like mathematics and have relegated humanities and the arts for the deemed to be hopeless. **Right Education** can be a driver towards gender sensitization. It would be a step in the right direction if only we can change our lens from which we currently view men or women.

The Class Room is **THE** place from which this change can start and gather momentum.

The undergraduate level is one of the most appropriate stage for a fruitful intervention now. It is the only stage in the Indian Education system that has the least amount of pressure to perform. It is powerful because, students for the first time and probably for the last get the luxury of time to reflect on what's happening around them. They are keen to develop their own world views and this generation has the privilege of making more choices. Last but not the least this generation is fired up for solving problems and to raise important questions and to find and accept unique and different answers.

Strategies for Gender Sensitization at the undergraduate level .

1. Special courses to be taken on contribution of women in society.
2. Niche courses should be administered on gender and its narrative across history.
3. Marketing and advertising courses should have lessons that speak against commoditization of women.
4. There should be an equal representation of girls and boys in Student Councils.
5. Cross Cultural Training and Sensitivity to be imparted through special workshops.
6. Encourage students to put up dramatic and debating activities and have a inter college festival on cultural and gender issues.
7. Awareness drives to be adopted to prevent stereotyping.
8. Colleges tend to give a grade sheet or mark sheet which only has marks. Students must also be given a paragraph on how they fare in emotional intelligence and sensitivity.
9. The skill of storytelling and the skill to articulate viewpoints must be taken up with as much vigour as business mathematics and research methodology.
10. FDP's on the same should be organized and rich and varied content should be used for the same.

Conclusion

Gender Sensitization is the heart of gender issues because it recognizes the inherent differences and so its natural progression is equality because we acknowledge the equal roles that different people play in the larger scheme of things.

The idea is so powerful that it can not only change gender bias and create a more equal society but also lies in the absolute centre of all sustainable issues. Our respect for nurturing will not only be limited to the feminine way of life but will extend to respecting the earth, the rivers and our entire eco system.

As Aung San Suu Kyi has expressed so eloquently "The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all"