

Gender inequality refers to the disparities between men and women in society. This divide has existed since antiquity and is still present in the social, economic, political, scientific, entertainment, and sports sectors in the 21st century. Discrimination against women is a key result of actions and behaviours that are carried out based on gender. Because of this, instances of female foeticide continue to exist today. For multiple reasons, hundreds of girls are not allowed to attend school even today. Although a lot has changed over the years and women are making contributions in many different professions, a sizeable portion of society is still affected by this imbalance. As a result, gender disparity is pervasive in society even now in our daily interactions, but it does not seem to bother us. These behaviours must be changed as soon as possible; only then will we be able to see the true significance of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights and make progress toward true equality.

Gender disparity is a result of several little actions and behaviours. Many schools assert that they treat all students equally and do not engage in gender discrimination. But during my 12-year teaching career, I have witnessed and experienced the gender inequalities that exist at the school level.

One day, I received a call from a student. She wanted me to explain some Hindi questions to her. Midway through the call, she said she would need to hang up as her brother had just returned from work and she had to serve him food. This made me question whether girls are still considered only suitable for domestic duties in modern society. If there is a sister in the house and the brother comes from outside, then, in the absence of the mother, should the sister serve food to him? And why should only mothers and sisters serve food? From childhood, boys and girls are assigned different household chores.

Through language, pictures, and stories, the division of household chores is based on gender. Schools also play an important role in promoting this difference. The strongly-held belief that household

work is the responsibility of girls and women and work outside the home is the responsibility of boys and men will begin to change only if we have in-depth discussions and ensure the participation of both boys and girls in school tasks.

When boys and girls are asked in class about their dreams, boys express their wish to join the army, or police force, or become doctors when they grow up. However, a majority of the girls choose a teaching career or question why they should continue their education since in the future they will only be required to do household work.

Whenever I ask my students about their professions, most of the girls give similar answers. This compels us to think that even though women go out to work with men today, due to social practices, only a few professions are considered suitable for women, one of which is the teaching profession. I am a teacher myself. During a conversation in the family or with others, whenever I mention that I am a teacher, everyone praises me saying that teaching is the best job for women because due to the fixed timings, along with the job, they can also give time to their families. Society has already decided what kind of jobs women should do, which is the reason girls are not able to think beyond these professions.

Here are some examples of practices promoting gender discrimination in schools:

- Using language that promotes gender inequality. Like if a boy cries, he is silenced by saying, 'Why are you crying like a girl?' There are many boys who are shy by nature and face difficulty in doing certain tasks assigned to them. They are also mocked with, 'Why are you feeling shy like girls?'
- In the class, separate seating arrangements are made for boys and girls right from primary school itself. The difference in behaviour is not very visible at a young age, but by the time they reach the upper primary, such a difference can be seen clearly.
- There are also separate rows for boys and girls in the morning assembly.

- When made to stand in queues, girls are always in the front and boys stand behind them.
- Traditionally, girls are in charge of leading the morning assembly.
- Activities like art, singing, rangoli, and decoration are included for girls, while boys are preferred for speech, debate, and poetry recitation.
- There is more participation of girls in cultural programmes.
- Boys participate in sports like running, cricket, and football, while for girls, games like carrom, Ludo, kho-kho, kabaddi, and badminton are organised.
- Tasks like cleaning the classroom and blackboard, and keeping the girls quiet are assigned to girls, while the boys are assigned the responsibility of keeping the whole class quiet, lifting buckets of water, moving or removing table benches, etc.

When I joined this school, Government Middle School, Banari, I came across many things that are knowingly or unknowingly contributing to promoting gender inequality. With a little thought, efforts can be made to remove this inequality in the school. I am a teacher therefore it is my duty that my approach to teaching be such that I can play my role in bridging this gap of inequality.

- We, along with the entire staff, have made some small efforts to break the stereotype that some sports are only for girls, or some are only for boys. We gave the girls the opportunity to play cricket and football alongside the boys.
- Arrangements were made to sit and eat the mid-day meal together, and the boys were also involved in the work of serving food.
- We decided to cultivate a garden in the vacant space behind the school. The place was very dirty – overgrown and filled with garbage. So,

all the teachers and children cleaned it together. Both female and male teachers took equal responsibility in this work. The children were also inspired by this, and both boys and girls actively participated equally.

- I observed that in cultural programmes, only girls participated in the dances. I have started trying to involve boys in dancing as well. I came to know that they felt shy about dancing because they were never called upon to participate in dancing. I talked to the children and explained to them that they should look at dance only as an art and show their skills to everyone. Thereafter, boys also started participating in dance programmes. Some boys told me that if I had not come to their school, they would not have had the opportunity to participate in dancing at all.
- In the classroom too, I have made certain modifications to remove gender inequality:
 - A democratic seating arrangement in the classroom for boys and girls.
 - During peer-to-peer, group learning, forming pairs or groups of boys and girls for activities.
 - Involving both boys and girls in role-play, etc., while teaching language.
 - Giving the responsibility of cleaning the classroom to both boys and girls.
 - Involving the girls in making science models.
 - Ensuring that both boys and girls participate equally in the assembly programmes.
 - Talking with them about what it means to be a girl and a boy; dividing their views in terms of tasks and sharing my point of view; asking the boys to help their mothers with household chores at home.



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