

# Chapter 14

## Gender-Role Socialization, Stereotypes, Government Policies and Development

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### 1 Introduction

Contemporary Indian society has taken a big leap with respect to the status of women. The transformation set in motion by rapid industrialization and urbanization from the 1990s got further fillip from the cultural deluge across continents and affirmative policies of the Government of India. Implementation of these policies has made available new roles, and new vistas have opened to women to express themselves in ways different from those of their traditional roles as housewives or mothers. These are, in turn, bringing about changes in the social ethos, permitting privileges to women hitherto not conceivable. These privileges are generally confined to urban, educated women in India, while women in the lower socioeconomic strata and in rural areas are still grappling with inequity and inequality at multiple levels. Nevertheless, urban women are none too happy with their situation (cf. Rathod 2009). The new roles thrown open to women are in settings different from the earlier ones, being less labour intensive, like agri- and home-based industries, but these are confined to certain specified areas; even in these jobs, the percentage of women who make it to the top is much smaller in comparison to men. The reason probably lies in the kind of abilities and the skills women possess, which are different from those of men—believed to be the result of gendered socialization practices prevailing in different cultures (cf. Elliot & Dweck 2005; Thayer et al. 2008). Changes taking place in women's roles as housekeepers and workers outside the house have placed demands on their time and personal-social resources, inviting changes in the cultural ethos and government policies. The direction and magnitude of these changes has implication for the wellbeing of the

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entire society. It is therefore important to examine how socialization and government policies facilitate women in taking up their future roles.

## 2 Gendered Socialization

Socialization practices are highly discriminatory against girls, particularly in matters relating to education and household work. Gender appropriate behaviour or adult gender-role learnt through socialization within the family is reinforced by the school and society. Children are encouraged to learn gender-role appropriate behaviours: while boys are expected to acquire high educational qualifications and obtain well-paid jobs in the organized sector; girls experience social and environmental constraints and comply with the expectation of family members. They are closely monitored in their environment and subjected to control by others, including by elders and their mothers (Kanhare 1987). Thus, the process of socialization channelizes the interests of girls exclusively to the home and domestic arenas. Implicit therein is the suggestion that they lack the competence and skills required for roles other than as wife and housekeeper. Walstead (1977) very eloquently puts it thus: “women have structured their entire lives around pleasing and serving men because this was the predominant mode they learned as they were growing up. They experienced feelings of being loved, normal, and safe when they did so and of being anxious and unlovable when they did not” (p. 174). Any initiative shown by women is considered gender inappropriate behaviour and likely to be met with disapproval. Even parental attitudes towards male and female children reflect the latter’s culturally assigned roles. While males receive more effective independence training and encouragement, dependence and conformity is encouraged among females (Hoffman 1972). They are encouraged to conform to the social standards laid out for them. Gender differences in research studies have also shown that women have less self-confidence and they are found to be more conformist than men (Maccoby & Jacklin 1974; Lenney 1977).

Gendered socialization influences role perception and identity as well as the personality characteristics of women, particularly in the way they are taught to express themselves: as affectionate, sympathetic and sensitive (Boldizar 1991). Due to this lopsided gender-role development, women have become central to the social institution of the family (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez 2002). Societal evolution in terms of changing role structures, economic pressures and exposure to alternative social realities of other cultures has challenged women’s traditional roles. Conflicts created due to these changes need to be addressed adequately. In this context, it is important to understand the social processes underpinning the construction of gendered personalities and issues emerging from differential socialization, which impact the development of self-esteem and wellbeing among women. Personality characteristics (particularly, expressivity) of women not only shape their role perception but are crucial for the wellbeing of society. In order to make appropriate interventions in the economic, social and political arenas, the processes influencing women’s self-perception and self-esteem must be analyzed.

### 3 Role Stereotypes

The reason that women find it difficult to realize their potential in spite of their ability and talent is probably due to women's own lopsided perception of their roles. Women tend to believe that intellectual achievement or success in male-dominated fields can impair their prospect for marriage. They fear success lest it may make them appear less feminine (Horner 1970). This fear of success is higher among intelligent (as indicated by their level of achievement) women from homes where high achievement is valued and for whom success in a career is possible (Mark 2011). Boys become independent, aggressive and active while girls become passive and docile, dependent on men for hard work and matters related to the outside world. Gender differences in decisional control show that the boys control more decisional outcomes than girls. Although the girls were less likely to perceive themselves as decision controllers compared to male counterparts in the oldest age groupings (Lind & Connole 1985) yet in the face of conflict, they have been found to use indirect strategies (Ohbuchi & Yamamoto 1990).

#### 3.1 *Role of Culture and Media*

The stereotypes portrayed in the literature and mass media reflect the values of the society and advertently or inadvertently reinforce the existing stereotypes (Rathod 2009). The fact is made explicit by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) in the following lines, "The great power of the male to control his own destiny is part of the cultural stereotypes of maleness and is inherent in the images of the two sexes portrayed on television and in print" (p. 157). The magazines that are supposed to tender advice on marital harmony and adjustment portray roles for women where they would be playing down their personality, curbing their urges and trying to soothe the hurt male ego. The literature is full of such examples and role models. These excessively feminine role models are the socially accepted and are successful ones: these are the only models available to them. Two research studies dealing with the influences on children's especially girls' occupational choices and preferences revealed that the role models influence their choice of occupation to a great extent (Mehta et al. 1984, 1987). Absence of role models in the areas of science and technology, engineering and other technical jobs could be responsible for their lack of skills and presence in these areas rather than the absence of fundamental ability to excel (Bussey & Bandura 1984).

The intelligent women tend to play down their abilities and sacrifice their careers for affective ends. Horner (1968) emphasized that since achievement in many areas is considered gender—inappropriate for women, a woman achieving in one of these areas might feel she was losing her femininity. Continuation in her profession or abandoning depends on whether her positive outcomes outweigh her negative outcomes, whether she would like to sacrifice her affiliation and approval needs for achieving excellence. The affiliation and approval needs are far greater

among women compared to men (Lips & Colwill 1978). Whenever there is a conflict between need for achievement and need for affiliation, the conflict tends to be resolved in favour of affiliation. If they do succeed in making a career, extra effort is made to demonstrate that they are feminine by demonstrating their capability as good mothers and good wives, etc. When the negative consequences of success are more they develop a fear of success.

### ***3.2 Personal Power***

Acceptance of the role accorded to them by society and the reality constructed around it is not without its own privileges. Women, were not completely bereft of power, even in the most traditional societies they used personal power by withholding love, affection and sex, to gain cooperation from men. However, this personal power lead to the development of their interests in the separate channels from men. It also restricted their areas of influence, while men are more influential in areas outside home, women may enforce their wishes on their husbands or in family. This inegalitarian status accepted and reinforced by society, including women themselves may have been necessary among primitive cultures, but it is no more relevant in present day situation.

## **4 Helplessness**

Learned helplessness is apparent in the self-defeating behaviour of the women. After experiencing loss of control in situations at home, they act helpless in other situations too. Loss of control over one's situation caused by exposure to unavoidable situations has been found to produce decreased motor activity, cognitive dysfunction and emotional disturbance; this kind of behaviour was designated helplessness by Seligman (1975). Studies with human beings revealed that exposure to situations where one does not have control produces emotional, cognitive and motivational disturbances (Hiroto & Seligman 1975). Women learn helplessness right from early childhood and this moderates their expectation from self and others. The feelings of helplessness make their cognition about world different from men and their construction of reality is different from men.

Glaring examples of helpless behaviour among women could be quoted. Women rarely seek redressal of their grievances on facing harassment whether in the office, home or anywhere else. Passive acceptance of the indignities and injustices meted to them, and becoming disturbed is the helplessness syndrome prevalent among the vast majority of women. The diffidence and self-effacing behaviour among women is indicator of helplessness (Johnson & Goodchilds 1976). Suggestion has been made by Johnson that because women are often in situations where they are not regarded competent, helplessness as a mode of easy escape to avoid consequences

in comparison with competence get rewarded. By acting in ways that show they are helpless, they get men to do the hard heavy work around the house. The helplessness behaviour in turn leads to separate areas of competence for men and women.

There are women although, in minority, (almost one percent of the total population of women) who are at the top of their chosen field. This bipolar situation of the women, “With a small section at the top of the politics, education, medicine, public health, law, journalism, administration, fine arts, advertisement, writing, etc., are not suffering any disability”. They do not behave as if they do not have any control over their situation. According to Horner (1968), the women who do become successful in male-dominated areas have been found to be more masculine than other women. But these are the women who defied or escaped the normal socialization process and have developed masculine personality characteristics. They are known to be more aggressive and domineering. Females preferring science-related and non-traditional type of careers had a positive role-specific self-concept and masculine perception of themselves (Baker 1987). Research studies have revealed differences in ability associated with feminine or masculine self-perception (cf. Pant & Sen 1993).

## 5 Gendered Competence

Gender differences have been noticed in different abilities by researchers exploring whether women really are the weaker sex, and whether there are innate differences in ability (cf. Elliot & Dweck 2005). Gender differences have been reported in a number of abilities such as verbal, numerical and spatial. Evidence for superiority of females to males in verbal skills, superiority of males in spatial and mathematical ability; and mechanical skills were found (Crain 1966; Debacker & Nelson 2000; Fredricks & Eccles 2002). The reason for these differences have been given, while verbal ability definitely seems to be more among girls, there are still some issues to be clarified. Until early adolescence age, there are no differences in quantitative skills among men and women. However, later these differences emerge, although these vary widely across populations (cf. Eccles 1994).

1. Studies on spatial ability also show data favouring men; however, these differences in spatial ability do not appear until after adolescence when boys start excelling. There is evidence that sex differences in other abilities such as creativity, analytical ability and reasoning, etc. have appeared in the psychological literature, (cf. Elliot & Dweck 2005) and a close scrutiny of these will reveal that on verbal measures, there is no trend towards superiority of any sex. Similarly, on verbal tasks involving analytical ability, girls are favoured but when comparisons were made on non-verbal tasks, boys are favoured.
2. In the realm of social skills, women seem to fare better than men. They are superior to men in social sensitivity and empathy but this ability has helped them land up in jobs as receptionists, social directors and hostesses but not as ambassadors or politicians (Lips & Colwill 1978). However, in direct assertiveness,

women are not so well. Bieri (1968) suggested that socialization process puts pressure on young girls and women to assume a passive and dependent role which may be responsible for the observed lowering of their ability. The trend in socialization of women indicates that the differences in ability found among them could be the product of construction of the cultural reality rather than real gender differences (Crawford & Gentry 1989). These gender differences in abilities and competence are mediated by the cognitive and self-efficacy beliefs which are brought about by the gendered social environment (Unger 1989), further facilitated by the job segregation (Costello & Stone 2001).

## 6 Cross-Gender-Role Conformity

The gender-role stereotypes spell out expectations from the two genders, leaving much less scope for women to deviate from the gender-role appropriate behaviour. Those women who defy the process of socialization and develop somewhat masculine personality traits have been found to be successful in the non-traditional careers (Sandberg et al. 1987). The fact that masculinity among women leads to their breaking away from their traditional roles and facilitates venturing into the non-traditional careers and male-dominated areas seems to indicate that it is not the gender per se that leads to the helplessness among women, rather it is gender-role identity that is responsible for their state of helplessness. There is plenty of evidence in the literature that suggests that gender-role socialization may be responsible for the helplessness among women (Radloff 1975; Radloff & Manroe 1978; Walker 1977–78). Women having been frequently exposed to situations as part of their role, experience uncontrollability of events and outcomes, which generates widespread generalized beliefs about uncontrollability of situations resulting in helplessness. Gender-role orientation has emerged as a very important factor predisposing women to learned helplessness.

1. *Gender-Role Continuum*: Researches on gender-role stereotypes revealed that the gender-role identity is not a bipolar concept of masculinity and femininity but these are two independent variables of masculinity and femininity. There are actually, four types of gender-role identities, those having high same gender-typed attributes are either masculine or feminine; and those high on both characteristics of masculinity and femininity called androgynous; and those low on both characteristics of masculinity and femininity called undifferentiated (Bem & Lenney 1975). There is yet another class of persons, although rare who develop cross-gender-typed behaviour like masculine women and feminine men somewhat comparable to the concept of *Ardh Narisheswar* in Hindu scriptures.
2. *Gender-Role and Helplessness*: Research evidence reveals that persons with same gender-typed attributes are more susceptible to helplessness manipulation in laboratory setting (Baucom & Danker-Brown 1979). A research study in which 160

college students of androgynous, masculine gender-typed, feminine gender-typed and undifferentiated subjects participated, half of them were exposed to uncontrollable situations which involved unsolvable concept-learning problems, and the other half were given solvable problems. The results showed that feminine gender-typed and masculine gender-typed persons showed cognitive motivational deficits as well as dysphoric mood in helpless or the unsolvable condition. Androgynous only showed dysphoric mood and undifferentiated did not get affected in any way. Stuart (1973) investigated the role of gender-role stereotypes in individual women's vulnerability to the helplessness effect. Using Bem's Sex-Role Inventory (1974), four groups were selected consisting of gender-typed males, gender-typed females, androgynous females, androgynous males and exposed these groups to discrimination learning task on which their outcomes were manipulated to create helplessness situation. Data indicated that gender-role stereotype rather than gender could be a factor in determining vulnerability to learned helplessness gender (cf. Elliot & Dweck 2005).

Gender-role differences in learned helplessness have been reported to influence formal operational thought (Overton & Mecham 1982) while feminine gender-role typed did not differ from masculine gender-typed in the mixed group, androgynous and helpless subjects performed poorly on several measures. Female undergraduates from four gender-role groups after exposure to helplessness condition chose their role in a team, subjects high in masculinity chose to be in control of team's problem solving in both helpless and non-helpless conditions; while none of the feminine sex-typed subjects, chose to control the team in helpless condition (Baucom 1983). Women have been found to be particularly susceptible to learned helplessness symptoms in male appropriate contexts (Baucom & Danker-Brown 1984). Pre-exposure to failure on masculine-stereotyped tasks produced helplessness among low-masculine participants. Data from this and many such studies suggested that feminine gender-role orientation might be a predisposing factor among women to learned helplessness (cf. Pant 1993). Pant (1993) found that the feminine gender-role and undifferentiated gender-role groups were highly susceptible to learned helplessness in comparison with the androgynous and masculine sex-typed girls, and the latter groups were found quite resistant to the learned helplessness.

## 7 Role Appropriateness Versus Career Aspirations

Research evidence presented here substantiates that generally most of the women who are socialized in traditional ways are rendered helpless in the face of failure especially in the male appropriate contexts. A small percentage of successful women who escape the socialization rigours, that is, develop cross-gender-typed behaviour are better equipped to take up the challenges. This constitutes a small insignificant minority and it is yet to be seen how they fare in terms of adjustment at home or in their personal lives with family and friends. If the rising divorce rates among the employed urban women are any indicator, the successful women

are becoming increasingly maladjusted in their personal and family lives. The socialization practices adopted in the family ensure that women develop gender-role appropriate attributes and any lacunae left by them are taken care of by the school environment, teachers, mass media, social propaganda and other institutions that directly or indirectly reinforce the gender-role appropriate traits and punish inappropriate gender-role. By and large, male-oriented competitive and individualistic education system harms women, whereas acquisition of inappropriate gender-role characteristics makes women successful and achievement oriented in competitive contexts (Crawford 1989).

The contradiction becomes quite apparent, the women who adapt to the cross-gendered role, although they may have achievement on their side but they loose out on the expressive personality traits like, being affectionate, sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of others (Boldizar 1991). These qualities are linked with constructive conflict resolution and interpersonal effectiveness in the family, with friends and in other social situations. The instrumental traits associated with masculinity include independence, assertiveness and dominance which are associated with control rather than conflict resolution. Gender-role-stereotyped behaviour as the organizing feature of family life in many cultures (Cauce & Dominech-Rodriguez 2002) is important for the society to facilitate development and achievement of women who are gender-typed, equipped with personal qualities that promote familial and cultural harmony.

Implicit in the empowerment of women lies the empowerment of men as well. Women constitute more than half the population of the country and repression of their self-expression renders them helpless as a result of which they take recourse to personal power. This personal power women exercise by way of denial of love, satisfaction and care to their female or male counterparts in vicarious relationships, cannot be healthy for anyone, men or women, families or society. The emancipation of women is needed not only for themselves but for the entire society. It is a struggle for peace and harmony of entire population that needs to be taken forward by both men and women together.

## 8 Development of Women

The three important aspects of the development of women are related to the empowerment of their Self exposure to outside world and the feeling of being in control, and dealing with the conflict in their lives with regard to relationships or economic matters or other resources. Three following components of women's position are critical:

- the extent of self-empowerment within the family settings;
- the development of personal-social and emotional competence to deal with the outside world and emerging conflicts due to multiplicity of roles;
- the level of confidence in self to effectively deal with challenges of decision making within and outside the household.



In order to make them feel empowered, there is need to develop social consciousness about the crucial contribution of women to the quality of life of both men and women. Meaningful action has already been initiated indirectly through the adult education, health care, social and legal justice-related programmes but direct statements of policy to influence social consciousness like prohibiting telecast of programmes and statements propagating gender-role bias and derogatory statements about women, prohibiting portrayal of women as sex-objects, and their misuse in print and media for publicity and advertising may help improve the social climate prevailing in the country which vitiates environment for women's emancipation. Although a number of facilitative policies have already been framed with regard to settling disputes related to divorce, domestic violence, dowry problems, etc. but the process of legal action is very slow, and the culprits more often get away because of long delays or the harassment of women who experience hostility from everyone even law enforcement agencies while facing such situations. Television, radio and other communication media such as print and even school textbooks have to be scrutinized carefully to analyze the attitude towards women portrayed therein. Suitable policy has to be framed and implemented so that programmes that inculcate gender bias among the viewers do not find their way to the media.

## 9 Government Policies

The Constitution provides equal opportunities with regard to education or jobs for women but it hardly creates any parity in the social situation of men and women. The approach to women development has been piecemeal or crisis driven, unrelated to overall economic transformation taking place in the society. Declaration of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976–85) acknowledged that although changes have taken place in the position of women, improvements are only relative and marginal. There is need to understand their role in holistic development of the economy and culture at the grassroot levels particularly in the rural agricultural and cash-stripped economical niches. Gender issues are closely linked with over all growth and development. The policies and steps taken for their implementation have to be enforced in the proper spirit, and the infrastructure required for the implementation of these policies has to keep up with the ground realities (Pandey 2002).

1. *Reservation for Women*: The policy of job reservation for women is intended to give them economic independence, but economic independence alone becomes meaningless if physical security and personal protection is lacking. The issues like residence for single in the urban areas, role conflict due to dual responsibilities of home and family, health, relationships—marital and working, physical security, etc. need to be tackled. Legislations related to Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Immoral Traffic Act, 1986, Hindu Succession Act, 1961, Immoral Representations of Worker Act, etc. modified from time to time have

to be examined comprehensively to empower women. The issues that empower women are less visible to the men legislators, wherever women participate in legislative structures, they raise attention to issues concerning women; at the same time, they contribute more compassionately and meaningfully to the problems of poor and helpless. The central- and state-level policy making bodies, like Planning Commission, Department of Women and Child Development, Department of Family Welfare, Education and Rural Development, etc., have to ensure special seats for reservation of women as members. It is important that women equipped with personal qualities that promote familial and cultural harmony are included in legislative, judicial and administrative positions.

2. *Integrative Policies*: Supportive governmental policies like provisions of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment which provided one-third representation to women in Chairperson positions in addition to Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) recommendation that two women should be co-opted members in addition to the regular strength of the Panchayat Samiti have helped the rural women to become somewhat visible in governance but the road to be traversed is long. The programme on Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) initiated during 1982–83 had its dual objectives to empower rural women economically and socially so that they can contribute significantly in the family (Dutta & Ghosh 2002). Saravia (2011) stresses on inclusion of more women in public space due to the possession of expressivity and interpersonal skills of conflict resolution, which they effectively bring to governance; women have been known to focus on issues that are important to the development of community right from grassroot level. Women participating in Panchayat in states of Andhra, Karnataka and West Bengal focused on drinking water, wells, schools, teachers appointment, closer of liquor shops, whereas men picked up issues of community hall, bus shelter, roads, etc. (cf. Pandeya 2007).

Inclusion of women in powerful committees at political, economic, technical and social levels will help drive away helplessness and empower them to view themselves positively and make use of the new opportunities thrown open to them. This is not in favour of women and their quest for development rather it is about laying the foundation of a healthy, prosperous and peaceful society by improving the lot of the other half of the population. The issues cannot be dealt in a crisis aversion and problem-solving paradigm; vision of society involving total transformation of women's position and status as equal partners in the processes of governance, legal justice, economy, grassroot local village administration is needed. Presence of women in these bodies like *panchayats* (see explanation in Chapter X, n. XX), *anganwadis* (explanation in Chapter X, n. XX), rural health schemes, entrepreneurial ventures, etc. needs to be ensured to empower them. This would help arrest the process of denudation of women's expressive personal qualities instrumental in effective and compassionate conflict resolution and management at different levels in the society. The resulting involvement and visibility of women in familial, interpersonal and societal levels would add to cultural development and evolvement of society not only with justice and equality but also moving towards a humane and peaceful global world order.

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