

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY IT?

What is gender and why should we study it? Simply defined, gender is the physical and/or social condition of being male or female. The interesting thing is that different societies and different cultures have different ideas of what it means to be man or woman, masculine or feminine. What is more, even within the same society, these ideas change over time. Your idea of femininity or masculinity may be different from that of your parents.

Why should we study gender? The most important reason may be that the experience of gender is emotionally charged for everyone, and especially so for young adults. Being a woman or being a man is a source of different kinds of pleasure and many positive emotions. But the experience can also be painful, confusing and a source of many anxieties. We all know that relationships between men and women are also shadowed by violence, both physical and psychological.

However, these experiences and emotions are rarely talked about. And only recently have we begun to actually study and discuss them. In the next Unit, which is about growing up as male or female, a well-known educationalist recalls that when he was growing up, girls and boys were segregated outside the home. He puzzled continuously over gender-related questions, but received no help in thinking them through. We hope this course will provide some "help" with your thinking!

A few years ago, a song by Dhanush, "Why dis kolaveri, kolaveri di?" went

viral. In a humorous mixture of broken English and street Tamil (Tanglish!), a young man asks a young woman why she is so angry.¹ The singer's point seems to be: We live in a modern world. Why can't men and women just be friends now? The word "just" in the previous sentence suggests there are no real problems that stand in the way of such friendship.

So the first question is: Are there no problems? In the "Kolaveri" song the young man touches on the question of class-caste relations. (He discusses it in terms of being fair or being dark). Should such things matter, the singer asks. He is right—they should not matter. But the problem is that they do! What is more, class-caste power is not simply something in the mind. It is structured into society. We encounter it every day and in most of the different contexts we move in.

Gender is another key axis of inequality. Women have had to fight against bias, discrimination and violence in many spheres of life. The struggle is for equality as well as dignity. In the process they have opened up questions that have enriched our understanding of personal relations, psychology, social formations, culture, politics, law, sports and even science. New work on masculinity has further developed the study of gender.

We should also note that it is those who hold power that are generally happy with things as they are. They find it difficult to understand what the "kolaveri" is all about! What is more,

¹ A century ago, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein wrote "Sultana's Dream," a story that is an even more humorous take on how women see men! We have put it on the website for your enjoyment.

they are quick to complain if they sense any change that questions their position or displaces their authority.

However, we suggest that both women and men stand to gain from a world in which they are equal. What is more, society also stands to gain from this equality. As we write this in 2015, many newspapers carry reports of a worldwide study which shows why fathers need to be more involved with raising children: "an involved father would yield a multitude of benefits, at both the family and the national levels."²

This course introduces you to some of the many issues that come in the way of gender equality and good relationships. If you look at the Contents pages of this book you will get a sense of these issues. You will also see that the final sections in this textbook are about friendships--but friendships that are "just" in another sense--the sense that is connected to justice and equality. Truly just relationships are between equals.

A well-known slogan from the 1970s is "Women Hold up Half the Sky!" Men hold up the other half—even if they sometimes think they hold up the whole sky!

Equality is of course what nations and nationalism are also all about. A modern nation stands for liberty from bondage of all kinds; for equality and "brotherhood" between its citizens; for justice and the rule of law as against violence and the rule of strength; for democracy. What is more, the nation as a political unit aims for the good life - in other words, security and happiness for all its citizens. Attention to the gender question expands and extends the scope of our nationalism.

Both halves of the sky need to be held up. And finally, in a to the gender question expands and extends the scope of our nationalism. Both halves of the sky need to be held up. And finally, in a democracy equals come together to study and discuss matters that concern them. This is what we also aim to do through this course.

Points to discuss:

1. Why have we printed the word "brotherhood" in quotes?
2. Can you think of a famous slogan from history that expresses the ideas that underlie nationalism? [Hint: The French Revolution]

If not, can you make up a slogan?

Milestones in the history of gender equality

It should give you some pleasure to note that in India we have had an important history of government initiatives and laws directed at creating gender equality. Although it is true that laws are not the whole story, laws are very important. It is also important to know what kinds of behavior are regarded as criminal and can invite legal punishment. What follows is a very brief account of the most important milestones in gender equality.

Independent India was among the very first countries in the world to have universal suffrage. Women got the right to vote in 1935, at the same time as men. In many countries, including some European countries, this happened much later. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the equality of all citizens.

Given this history, the 1975 Status of Women Report came as a shock. This is because it demonstrated that the condition of the vast majority of women had deteriorated since independence. What is more, the pace at which the deterioration was taking place had accelerated over the years. There was a declining sex ratio. Women were excluded from new jobs that had been created with industry and modernization. The number of women in all elected bodies was declining. Rural girls did not go to school, or, if they did, they dropped out rapidly.

For scholars and administrators the questions were: How did this happen? Also, how did their belief in constitutional guarantees and modernization turn out to be so deceptive? How did the education they had received make the marginalization of women invisible?

The report came out at a time when other questions were also being raised—about violence in the family (beginning with dowry deaths); sexual violence and custodial rape by the police and in hostels; about wages and property rights. Women's groups all over the country took up these issues. One of the very first groups of this kind was the Progressive Organization of Women, formed by Osmania University Women Students in Hyderabad in 1973; also in Hyderabad, was the autonomous women's organization, Stree Shakti Sanghatana, formed in 1978. Academics began to ask why the humanities and social sciences had remained blind to these issues.

Another shocking fact was that many laws were so formulated that it was very difficult for women to get justice. Patriarchal attitudes were present in the law and in the functioning of courts. There was a call for law reform and for the passing of new laws. In the Sections on "Domestic Violence:

Speaking Out," "Sexual Harassment: Say No!" and "Thinking about Sexual Violence," you will get a sense of the special laws that have been introduced to support women in fighting against violence. These special laws are framed keeping in mind the unique form of violence experienced by women—a violence which is often invisible and taken as natural. Not only new laws but also changes in the infrastructure such as women's police stations and courts have been introduced to enable women to make complaints.

The 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution, passed in 2009, provides for the reservation for women of one-third of the seats in village panchayats. This major legislation was aimed at correcting the imbalance between men and women in political representation and ensuring more attention to issues that concern women.

At the same time we need to remember that gender issues extend beyond law and government policy. The sphere of everyday life calls for serious attention. The discussions in the lessons that follow will introduce you to some of these issues. We have tried to do so through autobiographical accounts, stories, films and of course informative lessons and discussions.

You will find that all the material is available both in Telugu and in English. We hope that this will help all students grasp the ideas—and maybe also improve their English and Telugu. Our aim was to provide enjoyable readings, information and discussions. We hope you will also actively use the additional material available on our website.

 Watch the film "Ammayi" made by Mohana Krishna Indraganti. The film is inspired by Jamaica Kincaid's short piece, "Girl." We will be discussing both these in the next Unit.

Socialization

MAKING WOMEN, MAKING MEN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we leave for college or go to work, most of us look into a mirror. We see an image of ourselves. But if we ask: "Who exactly is looking at this image?" things get a little more complicated. It is true that the eyes that actually see the image belong to the person who is looking. But at another level—and this is more interesting—she (or he) is looking through the eyes of others who will see her. She checks her image out carefully, worrying about what they will think. She combs her hair and arranges it around her face to look good to people she wants to please. (And sometimes maybe to shock people she wants to shock!) She adjusts that image to make the right impression on her teachers; on someone who may be interviewing her for a job; on a boy or girl she likes; on her special gang of friends. Finally she leaves the house with a face that is acceptable to society and one that she is happy with (mostly!). It is her own face—but it is also a social face.

This is also an illustration of the process through which society shapes and trains people to become social individuals. Social scientists call this process socialization.

From childhood, boys and girls are trained to be the kind of people their society wants. The training begins early—in the family. This "training" continues in schools through teachers, textbooks, games and other activities. Boys especially learn a great deal about "being a man" from friends (peer groups). Songs, films, and stories add to it. Nowadays, companies talk about

socializing employees into the culture of the organization.

In the process of growing up and becoming adults, children are supposed to absorb that training and make it their own. Sometimes the training is subtle, sometimes it is harsh. Girls and boys learn the correct forms of behaviour, play, dress and so on. Girls become shy, soft, and afraid; they also learn to remain silent even when insulted or attacked (this is often regarded as preparation for marriage).

You may have heard a famous saying by the French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir: "**One is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman.**" In other words, gender is not natural—it is socially shaped. We learn how to behave as women and men and we perform those roles.

The important thing to understand is that femininity and masculinity are not something babies are born with. They are shaped into socially acceptable men and women. In this Unit, we will read and discuss five accounts of growing up. You will have seen the film Ammayi made by Mohana Krishna Indraganti. His film, as well as Jamiaca Kincaid's now-famous piece, "Girl" capture the process through which socialization happens, its relentlessness, its irrationality and its violence. We also need to understand that society has different messages for different women. In the extract from the story "Radam," we get a glimpse of the terrible risks faced by a girl who is "chosen" by powerful upper-caste men to be a jogini.

Boys are supposed to be strong, rough, dominating; they are not supposed to feel fear, express emotion or cry. They worry a great deal about "performance." This is related to career success, sexual prowess or capability, and the requirement that they have to lead and control—even if it is done violently. Such ideas of masculinity make it difficult for men to have happy intimate relationships with women.

"Growing up Male" by Krishna Kumar further explores these issues from the perspective of a boy growing up in a small town in India. In "I was a boy of nine when it happened," Dr Ambedkar recounts an experience that made him understand who he was for society. The final piece, by Khadeer Babu, is a delightful story about a boy who is poor and, what is more, doesn't speak Telugu at home. He is laughed at and dismissed by his teachers and the students they consider "clever." The story is about all this—and his heartwarming fight for his image.

Joopaka Subhadra's powerful account of a friendship at school that broke social boundaries is on the website. Also on the website is another story by Khadeer Babu, "Half Price, Three-fourths, Bajji Bajji." (We won't say more about it. Just enjoy it!)

One of the reasons for the new interest in gender socialization is that it is producing unacceptable results. Scholars and activists are asking: Is the violence in our society connected to the socialization of men into masculinity? Is it right to treat the environment of harassment that girls have to endure, and the anxieties that boys experience as "normal"? Can it not be changed to enable women and men to enjoy happy and meaningful relationships?

And finally: not all girls want to be soft—they also want to be strong, play games, take risks, climb mountains. Boys also need to express emotion; they can be afraid, sympathize with people, care for others, or write poetry. It is good if everyone, girls and boys alike, is sensitive, kind and strong.

Masculinity and hair styles

Look at the picture titled "Classic Gents Cutting Styles."

This is the kind of chart you find in a barber's shop and in some beauty parlours. Each hairstyle requires careful cutting and combing. Each is different. A customer may take a long time to decide exactly which style he likes. But when we look at them all together, in this chart, we also see that there is very little difference between the men who are all struggling to look good and male in very similar ways. These styles date back to the early 2000s. Of course men's hair styles and expressions of masculinity change over time.

Points to discuss:

Are today's styles different? Do they express a different sense of being male?

"*Girl*," written by the well-known Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid, was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1978. This story reads like a waterfall of instructions by a mother to her daughter, a young girl who probably is around 12-13 years old. You will notice that there are no full stops in the piece, only semi-colons! The girl receives instructions about housework—from washing clothes to cleaning the house, from cooking to sewing and mending! There are also instructions on how to walk, how to eat, who to talk to and who not to. You may have heard such instruction in your house too. What is most interesting is that the mother not only wants to teach the girl housework but is also anxious to teach her something else. She wants to teach her to be a good girl, or, to put it more accurately, she wants to train her to be a girl that everyone in society will recognize as a good and respectable girl! Twice the girl tries to respond, without success. Please read the slightly abridged version we have given below.

Girl

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk bare head in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum on it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in

Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a button-hole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; this is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day...; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something;...this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold;...this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way

something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; ...this is how to love a man; and if this doesn't work there are other ways;...this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

Points to discuss:

1. Are boys taught housework while growing up? Discuss your experiences at home.
2. Do you think both boys and girls should learn how to cook, clean and wash?
3. Do mothers alone give instructions like those listed in "Girl"? Have you heard these from others in the family like, fathers, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and even neighbours?

We will now read an excerpt from "Radam" (*Raw Wound*), a short story by the Telangana writer, Gogu Shyamala. In this excerpt, the little girl (the protagonist of the story) wakes up and finds herself in the middle of preparations for her departure to school in the town far away. The air is thick with anxiety and despair which she cannot understand, yet she follows instructions obediently and flees from the village, along with her father, to a residential school in a town where she will be admitted. The reason for this is that the sarpanch (also the most powerful landlord) of the village wants to designate her as a "jogini," i.e., a "sacred" woman whose life is dedicated to the service of god, and the sexual satisfaction of the landlords and elite of the village. Naming

a Madiga woman as a "jogini" is one feature of upper-caste power in Telangana. The excerpt shows us that for some madiga girls poverty is not the only obstacle to education. They must fight against the cruel social customs that oppress them and their family; must take great risks (defy the orders of the landlord, face great violence and even leave their lands and their village) in order to educate their young girls. Growing up as a girl, then, is not the same experience for all girls. Do read the entire story that is available on the website.

Radam—An excerpt

My mother roused me before the cock crowed. She took me out and gave me some charcoal for my teeth. "Brush your teeth quickly and I will braid your hair," she said.

"Why did you wake me up now?" I grumbled.

She replied, "Don't speak loudly." Hearing her tone I felt nervous and my sleep evaporated. As I quickly finished brushing my teeth and came into the house, I found my appa awake. He was arranging some papers and clothes in the suitcase. I watched him, and silently went to my mother at the stove. "Have you finished, my dear?" she said, pushing the firewood into the stove. "Unbraid your plaits," she said.

I looked a question, "Why this hurry?" She pacified me with a nod. I nodded back in assent. After she had tied the rotte bundle, she combed my hair. "Such thick and long hair! How will this little girl comb it herself every day?" she muttered, and then to me she said, "Don't fight with other girls. Be friendly with everybody. Do each other's braids."

I then understood that I was going to the hostel at Taandur. "I am supposed to go in two months, aren't I? Why now?" I asked.

At that moment, my grandmother Sangavva woke up and spoke almost in her sleep, "The plague be on them! May they die and their waist-cord be thrown into the tree! May their eating and shitting be stopped!" she cursed. "They have had an eye on us. It seems someone in the past laid a rule for our family—one of us must become a jogini. And we have to follow this rule—like that of a god. Curse that god! Doesn't he have children? A lineage? What sin have we committed? They have come like Yama himself to spoil our child's life." She began weeping. My mother leapt to Sangavva's side, held her shoulders and said to her, "This is no time to cry aloud. You will be heard and the news will find its way to the landlords. If they come to know, father and daughter will not leave the village today. Don't cry my dearest mother-in-law. Keep your mind strong," she said.

"Why do you cry, mother? Our god is with us and we will go as far as we can with our strength. I will never put my child in bondage and grief!" Appa said to Sangavva. She raised her head and looked at us. She wiped her red glowering eyes and said, "Yes my son. You have said what I feel in my belly. This family will not commit such an act. We cannot make this child a jogini. My mother, my grandmother, my great grandmother—nobody could point a finger at them! However much the landlords insist, don't give in. In the end, even if they put a sword to your neck, stay true. Keep the family's honour up, my son."

What was this commotion—what was a jogini? I didn't ask. I would come to know by and by. But my mind didn't stop wondering. I kept listening. The village seemed to be thinking about me. It was clear that the matter at hand was like a prickly thorn bush! That was why my family was so concerned. This much I understood. Then mother said, "If we sit talking about this, it will be dawn and you won't be able to leave. Hurry!"

My father wore his freshly washed dhoti and shirt, tied the striped towel to his head, put the black shawl on his shoulder. He picked up the suitcase in one hand, his wire-wound staff in the other. He touched his mother Sangavva's feet. He told me to do the same. I fell at her feet too. "Go safely, my children. May your task be successful", she blessed us. My mother woke my brothers up and said, "Wake up, my sons. Your sister is going to the hostel. Send them off," she said and had them touch my feet. "Be careful," she said to us.

Silently, we left the village. It was an hour to dawn. The morning star hadn't yet appeared. The Three Plough Spikes constellation was high in the sky. The moon shone bright on the path. My father strode ahead and I ran to keep up with him. The path was slushy. The frogs in the paddy field croaked loudly and as we passed, leapt into the water with a series of plops. The snakes on the plot boundaries slithered into the fields. We had to cross the village border by dawn. We had to go beyond the Mampuru lotus lake to the bus stop a mile ahead and board a bus to Taandur. We reached the road just as the bus came.

2.3 GROWING UP MALE

In "Growing up Male" the eminent educationalist, Krishna Kumar, thinks back to his own experience as a boy. He does this in order to better understand, (i) being a man in our society, and (ii) how schools can help improve the way girls and boys, men and women, relate to each other today. Segregation, in society as well as in schools, is a major problem. Girls are restricted to protected spaces. They are not encouraged to play or move around with ease in public places. Boys play in the open, occupy the street. Without ordinary, everyday contact with girls, boys stop thinking of them as individuals. Girls become a "great mystery" that boys have to painfully solve—without help from adults. Hence, as men they end up fearing women and feeling that the only way to relate to women is to dominate and control them.

Towards the end of the essay the author suggests that since conventional socialization gives rise to so many problems, schools should be places of "counter-socialization." By this he means that education should try and change the way society socializes women and men. You may find the idea of counter-socialization useful in thinking about the issues of inequality raised in the excerpts from the story "Radam," Dr Ambedkar's account of his childhood experiences, and Khadeer Babu's story about the school anniversary celebrations.

Think about the following questions as you read:

Boys: Does this description fit your experience of growing up male? If not, how?

Girls: Does this description help you understand boys better?

Growing up Male

... In my boyhood, the most significant event that shaped my map of men's and women's positions in the world was my entry into a state-run all-boys' secondary school, after finishing the primary grades ... One got so used to being with girls and to seeing them as ordinary children that it proved almost traumatic to move up to a secondary school where all children were boys and even the teachers were all men. This sudden separation from girls made no sense at first; a little later it led us to see girls as enigmas [mysterious; hard to understand]; and finally, we accepted it as a protection that society had offered us against the danger of coming in contact with a female human before we were ready for such contact. This rationalizing took years; it was a tedious [long and tiring] process, demanding tremendous amounts of psychic energy; and, of course, we never had access to an adult to ask any questions about the great mystery of girls and their separation from us.

The great mystery of girls

Girls went to a school that was designed conspicuously differently from the boys' school. In the centre of the girls' school was a courtyard where they played in total seclusion and safety from the outside world. Across all these years since childhood, I can still hear the shouts of girls playing games in that courtyard—shouts that we heard from our side of a broken wall we often toyed with the idea of climbing. Enclosed by a ring of classrooms, Ashok trees and the wall, the girls' school was legally accessible through a twenty foot high iron gate that was opened only twice a day—to let the girls in and to let them out. The boys' school had no such

courtyard or major entrance. Our playground was an annexe, just a big space attached to the school, devoid of any symbolism of confinement. This architectural difference between boys' and girls' schools is an important aspect of our school culture and it has persisted to this day.

Every evening we watched those hundreds of school girls in their blue skirts walking home in silent clusters of six or seven, crowding the narrow streets of the small town in a compact, neat style. As they walked, they looked impossibly purposeful. We boys used the street for so many different things—as a place to stand around watching, to run around and play, to try out the maneuverability of our bicycles. Not so for girls. As we noticed all the time, for girls the street was simply a means to get straight home from school. And even for this limited use of the street they always went in clusters, perhaps because behind their purposeful demeanour [look, behaviour] they carried the worst fears of being assaulted. Watching those silent clusters for years eroded my basic sense of endowing individuality to every human being. I got used to believing that girls are not individuals....

Domination

Aggressive behaviour and the desire to look ferocious, combined with and arising from a deep fear of women, were common among us by the time we came to the final years of the secondary school... Some of the boys who were older talked about marriage as an event that involved tremendous risk and adventure. We had learnt from textbooks, songs, dramas and lectures about the great celibate saints and poets of the Bhakti period. In the lives and personal development of some of them, we thought freedom from women had

played an important role. We had also read some verses written during the Riti period, and some of these, especially the ones we were supposed to read during undergraduate classes of Hindi literature, gave such precise descriptions of the female body that even our teachers felt too embarrassed to read them aloud.

To us it appeared that marriage was the only sure means to get close to a woman, and we found it very ironical and cruel that this one means was fraught with an impossible challenge and personal risk. No one seemed to know precisely what the challenge or risk was, but it was unquestioned knowledge that if you did not want to be defeated by a girl you must dominate her. Boasting about one's strength was extremely common. Some of the older boys were devout worshippers of Hanuman and Shiva—in that order—and they firmly believed that these gods were especially meant for men... In the first part of his autobiography Kya bhooolon kya yaad karoon, the Hindi poet Harivanshrai Bachchan describes in great elaboration the tremendous anxiety he had to go through in the months preceding his marriage...

The crucial part of growing up male was to learn to see girls as objects. I say "learn" because I still remember my perception of girls before I had begun to see them as objects and that my perception then was very different from what it became later. The sources of learning were many, the most important among them being other boys. Our contact with girls was minimal, in the sense that we hardly ever talked to any girl who was not a relative. And, of course, a sister did not count as a girl. On the other hand, we saw hundreds of girls each day of our lives—girls we could never hope to talk to.

We saw cinema posters and sometimes films, which mostly veered around cardboard female characters. Some of us read books that verged on pornography, where the treatment of the female was like that of a lifeless object that has no capacity to either suffer or enjoy. The conversations we overheard around us often consisted of references to women as a problem, and some of these conversations were among women themselves. I can recall several conversations among old women referring to girls as temporary property (for the family).

Equally profound was the influence of abusive terms that many boys used all the time even in the presence of adults, including teachers. These terms were metaphors of sexual intercourse, and the terms mostly referred to different categories of men; so, one learnt to see men as belonging to different types and levels of mettle or perdition, depending on who they had subjected to intercourse. In brief, as a boy I was surrounded by a powerful discourse that delineated girls and women as sex objects, with little or nothing of their own in life in terms of sensation or demand.

Counter-socialization

This kind of discussion leads one to wonder whether socialization is a closed process. Such a thought finds fertile ground in the commonly held view that the school and community should be complementary to each other in socializing the young. If one accepts this principle of complementariness, then there is no hope for changing the prevailing code of sex-typing through education, which means that there is no hope that education can intervene in the cultural reproduction of entrenched sex roles. Yet,

educationists never tire of telling the world that education is an agency of change. How does one get out of this contradiction? I think the way out is to propose counter-socialization as the school's domain. That is, we need not see the school as an institution working in harmony with the community or the larger society in the matter of sex-role socialization. On the contrary, we need to perceive the school in conflict with the community's code of socialization.

This line of thought would lead us to reflect on the ways and means by which the school can act as a counter-socializer in sex role learning. If the community believes in segregating the sexes during adolescence, the school must set an alternative example by mixing the sexes. Similarly, while the larger social ethos offers stereotyped models of men's and women's roles, the school must insist that the adults working in it will not act in stereotyped and stereotyping ways. In the world outside the school, knowledge about sex is taboo; in the school, such knowledge must be accessible.

Cinema and television cash in on conservative images of women and men; the school's media—that is, textbooks and other materials—should offer images and symbols that motivate the reader to look at human beings in terms of their own struggle for an identity, rather than as reciting prefabricated conversations. And finally, if acceptance of the prevailing order and its norms is what society demands, then the school should demand the spirit of inquiry and offer opportunities to practise it. If all this sounds an idealistic tall order, then one must remember that the agenda of changing women's place and role in society is no different.

2.4 FIRST LESSONS IN CASTE

All of you must have heard of Dr B R Ambedkar (1891-1956), a very important national leader and architect of the Indian constitution. He was also the primary spokesperson for the dalits (former untouchables) in our country. Ambedkar's family was from Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra. His father had left their hereditary occupation as a Mahar to work in the British Army. After retirement he worked as a cashier in Goregaon. This is an account written by Ambedkar himself which tells us about a journey from Dapoli to Goregaon. He was nine years old at that time and was going, with other children in the family, to spend the summer vacation with his father. At the end of this excerpt Ambedkar discusses how he learnt that for society he was an untouchable!

"I was a boy of nine when it happened"

...Great preparations were made. New shirts of English make, bright, bejewelled caps, new shoes, new silk-bordered dhotis were ordered for the journey. My father had given us all the particulars regarding our journey and had told us to inform him on which day we were starting so that he would send his peon to the railway station to meet us and to take us to Goregaon.

The railway station was 10 miles from our place and a tonga (a one-horse carriage) was engaged to take us to the station. We were dressed in the new clothing specially made for the occasion and we left our home full of joy...

When we reached the station my brother bought the tickets and gave me and my sister's son two annas each as pocket money to be spent at our pleasure. We at once began our career

of riotous living and each ordered a bottle of lemonade. After a short while, the train whistled in and we boarded it as quickly as we could for fear of being left behind. We were told to detrain at Masur, the nearest railway station to Goregaon.

The train arrived at Masur at about 5 in the evening and we got down with our luggage. In a few minutes all the passengers who had got down from the train had gone away to their destination. We four children remained on the platform looking out for my father or his servant whom he had promised to send. Long did we wait, but no one turned up. An hour elapsed and the station-master came to enquire. He asked us for our tickets. We showed them to him. He asked us why we tarried. We told him that we were bound for Goregaon and that we were waiting for father or his servant to come, but that neither had turned up and that we did not know how to reach Goregaon. We were well-dressed children. From our dress or talk no one could make out that we were children of untouchables. Indeed the station-master was quite sure we were Brahmin children and was extremely touched at the plight in which he found us. As is usual among the Hindus, the station-master asked us who we were. Without a moment's thought I blurted out that we were Mahars. He was stunned. His face underwent a sudden change. We could see that he was overpowered by a strange feeling of repulsion. As soon as he heard my reply, he went away to his room and we stood where we were. Fifteen to twenty minutes elapsed; the sun was almost setting. Father had not turned up nor had he sent his servant, and now the station-master had also left us. We were quite bewildered, and the joy and happiness which we felt at the

beginning of the journey gave way to a feeling of extreme sadness.

After half an hour the station-master returned and asked us what we proposed to do. We said that if we could get a bullock-cart on hire we would go to Goregaon, and if it was not very far we would like to start straightaway. There were many bullock-carts plying for hire. But my reply to the station-master that we were Mahars had gone round among the cartmen and not one of them was prepared to suffer being polluted and to demean himself carrying passengers of untouchable classes. We were prepared to pay double the fare but we found money did not work.

The station-master, who was negotiating on our behalf, stood silent not knowing what to do. Suddenly a thought seemed to have entered his head and he asked us, "Can you drive the cart?" Feeling that he was finding a solution for our difficulty, we shouted, "Yes, we can." With that answer he went and proposed on our behalf that we were to pay the cartman double the fare and drive the cart, and that he should walk on foot along with the cart for the rest of our journey. One cartman agreed as it gave him an opportunity to earn his fare and also saved him from being polluted.

It was about 6.30 pm when we were ready to start...we put our luggage in the cart, thanked the station-master, and got into the cart...Not very far from the station there flowed a river. It was quite dry except at places where there were small pools of water. The owner of the cart proposed that we should halt there and have our meal as we might not get water on our way. We agreed. He asked us to give a part of his fare

to enable him to go to the village and have his meal. My brother gave him some money and he left promising to return soon.

We were very hungry and glad of the opportunity to have a bite...We opened the tiffin basket and started eating. We needed water to wash things down. One of us went to the pool of water in the river basin nearby. But the water really was no water. It was thick with mud and urine and excreta of the cows and buffaloes and other cattle who went to the pool for drinking. In fact, that water was not intended for human use. At any rate, the stink of the water was so strong that we could not drink it. We had therefore to close our meal before we were satisfied and wait for the arrival of the cartman. He did not come for a long time and all that we could do was to look for him in all directions. Ultimately he came and we started on our journey...

...By midnight, we reached [a] toll-collector's hut. It was situated on the foot of a hill...When we arrived, we saw a large number of bullock-carts there, all resting for the night. We were extremely hungry and wanted very much to eat. But again there was the question of water. So we asked our driver whether it was possible to get water. He warned us that the toll collector was a Hindu and that there was no possibility of our getting water if we spoke the truth and said that we were Mahars. He said, "Say you are Mohammedans and try your luck." On his advice I went to the toll-collector's hut and asked him if he would give us some water. "Who are you?" he inquired. I replied that we were Musalmans. I conversed with him in Urdu, which I knew very well, so as to

leave no doubt that I was a real Musalman. But the trick did not work and his reply was very curt. "Who has kept water for you? There is water on the hill if you want to go and get it, I have none."

This incident has a very important place in my life. I was a boy of nine when it happened. But it had left an indelible impression on my mind. Before this incident occurred, I knew that I was an untouchable and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations. For instance, I knew that in the school I could not sit in the midst of my class students according to my rank but that I was to sit in a corner by myself. I knew that in the school I was to have a separate piece of gunny cloth used by me. I was required to carry the gunny cloth home in the evening and bring it back the next day. While in the school, I knew that children of the touchable classes, when they felt thirsty, could go out to the water tap, open it and quench their thirst. All that was necessary was the permission of the teacher. But my position was separate. I could not touch the tap, and unless it was opened by a touchable person, it was not possible for me to quench my thirst...All this I knew. But this incident gave me a shock such as I never received before, and it made me think about untouchability which, before this incident happened, was with me a matter of course as it is with many touchables as well as untouchables.

Points to discuss:

1. "We were prepared to pay double the fare but we found money did not work," says Ambedkar. Why?
2. Ambedkar tells us that he was asked to sit separately in class without touching anyone else. Have you ever heard of such incidents in your school or anywhere else? Do you think such things happen today? Is untouchability still practiced in India?

On the website we have a story by Joopaka Subhadra called "Friends in School, Not in the Village" which talks about how children in school deal with such issues.

2.5 DIFFERENT MASCULINITIES

The story in this lesson, written by Mohammed Khadeer Babu, is a more light-hearted, yet thought-provoking account of prejudices that a young boy faces in his village school.

"How I upstaged the 'Clevers' of my class"

Goda Lakshmi and that shorty Arcot Kalavani would preen no end as they led the daily prayer. And all for what? It was just a four line verse on Vinayaka! With voices really thin and high pitched, they would pout stylishly as if pure gold was tumbling out of their mouths by the kilo. They'd sing each line, prolong the tune at the end and then glance coyly at the rest of us who were to pick it up and sing it in chorus. With their smug smile, they seemed to say, "Look at us, we are the 'clevers' of the class!" This was their daily drama.

I burned with resentment and envy watching their antics. Each day I'd brood bitterly—wasn't I fully and equally capable of leading the prayer song? Hasn't God given me an equally good voice? But who would listen to me!

The school headmistress, Rama Devi, and the English teacher were both very displeased with me because I was so irregular. As for the Maths teacher, Malayadri sir, the only time he ever touched me or came near me was to do additions and subtractions with his cane on my bare back. The social studies teacher, Rukmini, was kind to me and I could always wangle a favour from her but sadly she didn't have the "authority" to decide who led the prayer at assembly.

So, all I could do was to hide my pain and send out a silent threat to those clevers, "Just you wait, you smartypants, I am going to lead the prayer one day! Come what may!"

That day, we sat in the classroom after the morning assembly as usual, when Rama Devi teacher walked in five minutes later, her chappals flip-flopping and announced, "No class today, I'm busy with the preparations for the anniversary day." She added, "All those who are interested in acting, stand up." Even before she finished the sentence, Kanduri Murali, Kandula Malakonda Rao, Goda Lakshmi, Parvati, and N. Manasa, all shot up from their seats. These were the clevers of the class; Rama Devi teacher was convinced that they were capable of doing everything under the sun!

My heart beat rapidly. I realized that this was my chance to display my true prowess, so I stood up slowly.

But Rama Devi smiled as soon as she saw me. "What will you do? With your atrocious 'maaki, meeki' Telugu! Never regular to school, but 'saar' is interested in drama now," she sneered. (Ever since the last Independence Day when I had asked her if I should "shatter" the thread I was using to tie something up, she always sniggered at my Telugu.)

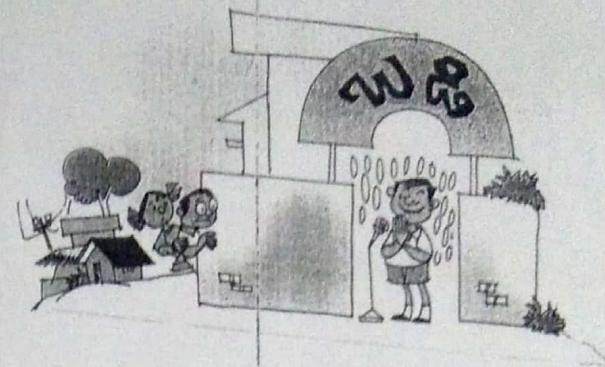
I sat down crushed while the entire class laughed with their teeth on full display. Utter humiliation! It was just like last year when I was in the fourth class. The clevers would be allowed to bunk two classes in the morning and two in the afternoon session just so that they could rehearse for the plays and other events; dumbos like us would be chained to the class and asked to

repeat our lessons endlessly. However, most of the dumbos were better off than me; I was the lowliest among them. The clevers, of course, never talked to me but even half of the dull buggers in class hardly said a word to me. They treated me with utter contempt.

They always looked down upon me because my uniform was invariably crumpled and soiled (I felt that my father deserved the worst punishment for not getting me a new uniform despite the fact that I pestered him valiantly for three months. Well, it was true there was never enough money, but still he could have done something.) The class also looked down on me because I wore my school shorts torn at the back with a safety pin holding it together from the inside (my grandma made this temporary arrangement with the pin because there was no thread to sew it). I was the boy who didn't finish his homework, the one who wouldn't have his lunch box ready on time (that was because lunch wasn't cooked sometimes). So, they teased me and poked fun at me all the time—"The dimwit who skips school," "the dumbo who cannot study," they'd sing. I put up daily with their ragging but the teacher, Rama Devi's laugh today really infuriated me.

Am I to blame if I don't know Telugu? We don't speak the language at home. No one speaks it in our Kasab galli. In spite of this, I've been trying my best to speak Telugu and also learning to read and write in English and Telugu. And here was Rama Devi teacher, not showing the least bit of sympathy, laughing at me. My blood boiled.

That night I slept next to Grandma and poured my heart out to her, sobbing



all the while. Grandma got really angry, "Does this teacher know our language? How dare she scold you for being poor at Telugu." She hugged me tight and cursed Rama Devi teacher roundly.

But I couldn't sleep the whole night. My head was abuzz. I was thinking hard, "How to avenge my humiliation?" And then suddenly I remembered Gabbar Singh!¹

I didn't really know much about this fellow Gabbar and I couldn't understand a word he said. And yet, I knew everything he said by heart. Whenever, my father could spare the cassette player from work, he brought it home and listened to Gabbar Singh's dialogues again and again. What if I recited those dialogues for the anniversary day? The idea seemed fantastic to me!

The next day when all the clevers went for rehearsals, I slipped out of class and slowly approached the thatched hall where they were being held. Rama Devi teacher was all set to shoo me away with her cane, when Moustache Subbaraju sir who had arrived just then spotted me. He called out, "Hello there! You are Karim's son, aren't you? Why aren't you in class?"

"I do have class sir, but I want to act," I replied timidly.

¹ Gabbar Singh is the famous villain of the super hit Hindi film Sholay (1975). Played by actor Amjad Khan, Gabbar Singh is a dangerous dacoit whose laugh, mannerisms and dialogues from the film became immensely popular all over the country.

"Oh, I see! And what do you want to act?" he laughed warmly, his moustache quivering.

"It's Gabbar Singh, sir! Shall I show you?" And worried he might say no, I launched off in a most fearsome voice, "Kitne aadmi the?" And starting from there I went through the entire monologue—I recited the "Goli khaa" bit and sailed through the loud guffawing, "Ha Ha Ha . . ." until tears sprung to my eyes just as they had come to Gabbar's eyes. And carried on until I finally came to a halt with "Kab hai holi . . . holi kab hai." This breathless delivery left everyone including Rama Devi teacher staring at me wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

As for Subbaraju sir, he was thrilled to bits.

"Bravo, Son of Karim! You should definitely do this act for the anniversary." Rama Devi teacher stared speechlessly at him and me by turn.

And thus it was that all the skits and plays and dance performances that the clevers put up paled in comparison with my Gabbar Singh act. I raised a storm on the stage and walked away with all the accolades. And do I really need to add that from then onwards, whenever Goda Lakshmi from the sixth class was absent, or when Kalavani came late, it was I who was called upon to lead the prayer at assembly.

Points to discuss:

1. Can you remember feeling angry about teacher's favourites or those who the school assumed were the "clevers" in all contexts and all the time? Or were you one of the "clevers" yourself?
2. The story is also about competition/ evaluation in our educational system. It is also a subtle discussion of merit. What does it have to say about these much debated concepts?
3. In what way, according to the story, are merit and privilege connected?
4. Education and privilege are important to gain fluency in any language, whether it is English or Telugu. Those who speak fluently are usually considered intelligent. Is it true? Are all those who don't have fluency stupid?

Singaraju Ramadevi's analysis of masculinity in the box below provokes further thought.

Profile of the Telugu Film Hero: A dangerous model of masculinity

"I know you are wondering whether I'm a good guy or a bad guy! One thing is for sure, I'm definitely not a good guy," says the hero of a recent box-office hit in Telugu.

Most of the recent successful films in Telugu revolve around the themes of love, enmity, revenge, violence. In fact, the story as such has disappeared from most films and the importance given to the male protagonist has grown to such an extent that it subsumes the story and every other character in the story. The other characters in the narrative either exist to sing his praises, or to provide a few laughs through their antics. The role of the antagonist is to ignite the flames of vengeance in the hero's heart and the heroine exists as lover or wife to proclaim and reaffirm his sexuality and masculinity.

- If the hero of the Telugu cinema of yesteryears was criticized for being a paragon of virtue with hardly any flaws, today's heroes have successfully laid to rest such criticisms. However, we would be mistaken if we were to conclude that they are now more realistic or down-to-earth. Far from it, they are now *Pokiri* (Vulgar Vagabond), *Julaayi* (Good-for-Nothing) and *Idiot*.
- He gets drunk, abuses and beats up people and generally creates a nuisance in public. (*Venky*)
- His life's mission is not to become a lawyer or a collector like it used to be earlier. Today he dreams of becoming a mafia don and works towards realizing that dream. (*Don Seenu, Business Man*)
- He has no respect for the law, even when he himself is a policeman. Very often, he takes the law into his own hands and goes around beating up and even killing people. (*Temper, Gabbar Singh*)
- If the girl he desires is the sister of a rowdy leader, he joins the rowdy gang, participates in all their illegal and anti-social activities and succeeds in winning the girl's heart. (*Dhee, Loukyam*)
- As for such unhealthy habits as smoking and excessive drinking, our current heroes are great proponents of these habits. (*Don Seenu, Gunde Jaari Gallanthaiyinde, Resu Gurram and many more...*)

And of course, every hero is a muscular strong man (with six packs) who wields all kinds of weapons from the axe to a gun, drives every mode of transport from a horse to an aeroplane and can thrash twenty men to pulp single-handedly, boasting of his super-human masculine prowess all the while. (Examples abound in all the above mentioned films and more.)