



INCULCATING GENDER CONSCIENCE IN SCHOOL SYLLABI: AN ANALYSIS OF HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL ENGLISH TEXT BOOK

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ABSTRACT

The present paper analyses the role of English syllabus at the Higher Secondary level in upholding the concept of Women Empowerment. It also attempts at a unit wise analysis of Std. XII English reader to identify the treatment of women empowerment in the course content. The analysis of the content reveals an in-depth discussion of the elements of women empowerment. This unit analysis reminds the fact that education, job and self awareness helps the woman to become powerful. It brings to light how women can overcome their social and cultural backwardness through education, determination and courage. The present English syllabus at the Higher Secondary Level (XII) helps the learners to realize the importance of empowering women for the overall upliftment of a nation. It is praise worthy to notice that the content units help the learners to develop an empathetic attitude towards social issues.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, Indian women face several challenges. In order to build a healthy nation it is need to mainstream women's perspective in all developmental processes, as a catalysts, participant and recipients. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. The process of women's empowerment is conceptualised in terms of personal assertion, self-esteem and confidence, ability to protect themselves as women, attaining socio-political participation and economic independence, ownership of productive assets and providing leadership. According to United Nations, "Women empowerment is a process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices".

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1978) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues, from welfare to development. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The Government of India declared 2001 as the year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti).

Empowerment of women needs to be operated at different levels- Economic (poverty eradication, women and economy,

globalization, women and agriculture, etc.), Social (education, health, nutrition, sanitation, rights of the girl child, etc.), Political (gain political power and execute political responsibilities), Psychological (face situations without fear and secure moral satisfaction) and Familial (make independent decisions in the family, avoid domestic violence and relationship battle among family members).

Subrahmanya Bharathi, the Indian poet and social reformer has once said, empowered, enlightened women can take the lead in building a good family, a compassionate society, and a more tolerant world.

The literary world too has strongly been advocating the struggle for women's liberation and equal rights through prose and verse. The post-independent India has witnessed the emergence of zealous women writers who have been successful in expressing their independent identity.

However, in our country, there is the need for a sea change in the mindset and attitude of the people to truly understand the meaning of women's empowerment.

Objectives

1. To analyse the syllabus of English at the Higher Secondary level to identify contents that uphold the concept of Women Empowerment
2. To content analyse the treatment of Women Empowerment in first unit of the English Reader at the Higher Secondary level (XII).

Analysis of the Syllabus of English at the Higher Secondary level to identify contents that uphold the concept of Women Empowerment

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The prime concerns of the conceptual areas of syllabus of English at higher secondary level(XII) are awareness of humanitarian and constitutional values, attitudes that strengthen social life, growing social commitment etc. And the syllabus consists of five units. Each unit is again divided into subunits. The first unit is 'Flights of Freedom' and the focal theme is Women Empowerment. Second unit is 'Heights of Harmony' and the main theme is Learner and the society. The third unit is 'Challenges of Life' and the theme is Social Entrepreneurship. 'Live and Let Live' is the fourth unit and which upholds the theme Health and Environment. And the last unit is 'The Lighter Side' and the focal theme is Humour and Language. Deliberate attempt has been made in the syllabus to cater to the needs and aspirations of the learners, society and the teachers. Nature of literary text used- Speech, Poem, Short Story, Anecdote, One-act Play, Interview and Personal Story. In a unit, activities for various learning outcomes are distributed in an inter-related manner. This is comprehensive in nature. The syllabus ensured gender justice and gender equality. Discrimination on the basis of gender is not reflected in the content areas. When we go through the first unit we can see that the literary text used are speech, poem, story and an anecdote. And these are arranged in an inter-related manner, so that the learner could easily understand and assimilate the main theme 'Women Empowerment'.

Analysis of the unit 'Flights of Freedom'

The first unit of English reader at Higher secondary level (XII) is 'Flights of Freedom'. The unit comprises a speech 'The 3Ls of Empowerment' by Christine Lagarde, the first woman Finance Minister of France, a poem 'Any Woman' by Katherine Tynan, a story 'Matchbox' by Ashapura Debi, and an anecdote 'Horegallu' by SudhaMurty. And this unit discusses the concept 'Women Empowerment'. This unit tells us how education, determination and courage help women break the shackles of socio-cultural taboos.

Learning outcomes expected by the unit with respect to women empowerment

Students will be able to

- Analyse the concept of women empowerment and understand the power of education as a tool for their liberation.
- Uphold the importance of freedom for women.
- Recognize the rights and privileges of woman and work for their equal status with men.
- Identify the space of woman in the Indian socio-cultural scenario.
- Develop an empathetic attitude towards social issues.

The 3Ls of Empowerment (Speech)

Main Concept: Women Empowerment – the importance of empowering women for the overall upliftment of a nation

This speech was delivered by Christine Madeleine Odette Lagarde, the first woman to become the Finance Minister of G8 economy (France) and to head the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the National Democratic Institute, Washington DC, on 19 May 2014.

According to Christine Lagarde 21st century poses many challenges and that insist us to think about the economic role of women in a rapidly changing world. But women today remain blocked from contributing their true potential. And

when we take the per capita income of some countries it can be identified that their per capita income lag significantly because women are denied equal opportunity. For changing this picture we have a concerted effort to open the door to opportunity and what she call '3Ls' of women's empowerment: learning, labour and leadership.

The first 'L' is learning, and it helps women to help themselves and break the shackles of exclusion. And the second 'L' is labour, which facilitates women to flourish and achieve their true potential. At present, women are denied of equal opportunities at work place and they get stuck in low-paying, low-status and low-security jobs. But recent researches show that eliminating gender gaps in economic participation can bring an increase in per capita income. The third 'L' is leadership that enables women to rise and fulfill their innate abilities and talents. According to Lagarde it is time to create a world where all women can meet their potential without impediment or prejudice and the world will reap the benefits. The three Ls will help us get there.

Any Woman (Poem)

Main Concept: The multi-faceted role of women in a family.

Any Women by Katherine Tynan describes the traditional roles of women. The poet here opposes the cultural stereotypes. The poem has distinct point of view, concerning itself with the breadth of human experience. The poem pose many questions before us. Do women enjoy real freedom? Women support a family, but are they really supported by the family? Do women share equal status with men? etc. The poem 'Any Women' presents the all-embracing power of a woman to hold a family together. The poem celebrates the glory of womanhood – the spirit behind the existence and sustenance of life on earth. The theme, the glorification of womanhood, is an oft repeated one in literature. But 'Any Woman' becomes remarkable with its poignant imagery which conveys the theme perfectly. This theme is all the more relevant in the modern world where womanhood is tampered and tarnished mercilessly. Katherine Tynan's poem becomes a reminder to women also since they too forget their own worth. The poet's message is clear. 'Any Woman' is an eloquent encomium in which each line speaks volumes about 'womanhood'.

Matchbox (Anecdote)

Main Concept: Gender inequality, gender discrimination and its cultural dimension 'Matchbox' by Ashapura Debi showcases a woman's strength, willpower and sense of righteousness. It tells the story of a married couple. The man has the habit of opening his wife's mail and reading it. He tells her it is his right to screen her mail to see if she has a lover. She is more or less confined to the house by the way of custom why her husband is free to go wherever he wants and stay out at all hours without being questioned. One day, the wife explodes with rage and the story describes its repercussion in the family. It unveils the unhealthy man-woman relationship existing in most Indian families. The writer compares women to matchboxes. Matchboxes have the potential to light up everything into fire. But in appearance, they are meek and harmless. It is the same with women in their outlook. They also appear to be meek and harmless, but they can set everything into fire within no time.

Horegallu (Anecdote)

Main Concept: Sharing and caring – the need for social togetherness

‘Horegallu’ is taken from a set of short stories entitled ‘The Old Man and his God’. Sudha Murthy introduces real life experiences of her works. She holds up a mirror to the lives of the people of her village and attempts to trace their stress and spirit of daily life. Whenever the writer sees a horegallu, she remembers two persons who were true horegallu. She tells the story of a banyan tree in a remote village in Karnataka that gives shelter to travellers under its shade, and of her grandfather who sits on a stone under the tree and lets passers-by share the seat and their troubles with him, acting as a counsellor to them, letting them unburden their worries on him for a while.

Everyone needs a Horegallu in their Life's journey. It can be a break, a talk with a friend, vacation, or even an argument which refreshes/refocuses you on your path. Some people are good listeners and trustworthy not to publicize your secrets/problems. We need such people in our lives and should thank them whenever we can.

Major Findings

- The syllabus of English at higher secondary level reflects social realities.
- It addresses issues and concerns of different segments of society.
- Human values are clearly woven in the syllabus.
- The syllabus of English at higher secondary level are pivotal sources of knowledge, and they include issues of equity and equality, as children both boys and girls from all segments of society access them.
- Portrayal of Gender relation and their contributions are clear.
- The syllabus of English at higher secondary level addresses contributions and achievement of men and women in an adequate manner.
- It reflects heterogeneous identities of all groups in an inclusive manner
- The syllabus of English at higher secondary level bridge all segments of society related to gender, caste, class and religion and location.
- The English Reader at higher secondary level assists in initiating transformatory attitudinal changes among learners.
- The English Reader at higher secondary level helps in addressing different forms of conflicts.
- The English Reader at higher secondary level sensitize on promoting critical thinking among children for questioning stereotypes, myths and misconceptions and customary practices derogatory to the status of women.
- Diversity in men and women reflected in the text.
- Marginalized groups and their cultures and lifestyles represented.
- The theme reflects diverse areas of contributions of women substantially.
- The English Reader explains how women are reflected in different domains of society in relation to Family, School, Workplace and Society.

- It explains the activities performed by women like collection of water, nursing, child care, fetching fuel wood and all activities related to household chores.

CONCLUSION

In India there are a lot of specific legislations for women to ensure their rights, safety etc. Even though today they face several challenges like lack of education, lack of initiative, lack of support, social responsibilities etc. They are sometimes marginalized, neglected and even victimized. And these factors resist them from identifying their own true potential and to contribute it to the society. So there is the need for a sea change in the mindset and attitude of the people to truly understand the meaning of women's empowerment. If we want to make a change in the society it should start from the grass root level. The adolescence is the appropriate stage for developing the attitudes and values such as respect, empathy, tolerance, compassion, social responsibility, positive attitude, commitment, ethical, legal and cultural values etc. The English syllabus at higher secondary level is organized in such a way that students can develop a sense of responsibility and discipline towards the community without any gender discrimination. It helps them to reflect values like avoiding conflicts and situations leading to conflicts, peace and harmony. It also develops a sense to respect basic human dignity of a person in all aspect of society life. It refrain students from taking part in activities such as spreading feelings of hatred or enmity. It helps to update oneself on social issues and how to respond to life situations. It gives an insight to students that we can make women capable of meeting any challenges by providing adequate awareness, training and skills. If we provide an opportunity for them, they will prove that they are capable of doing professional duties outside their homes. They can do jobs and earn income for their families. They also are professionally successful as social leaders, sports star, actors etc.

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