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# Engendering the Classroom: A Look at Constructions of 'Gender' and Empowerment within Teachers' Trainings in Northern India

Martha Snow  
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# **Engendering the Classroom: A Look at Constructions of ‘Gender’ and Empowerment within Teachers’ Trainings in Northern India**

**Martha Snow**

Program Directors: Tara Dhakal and Trilochan Pandey

Project Advisor: Ishani Sen, Pravah

School for International Training India: Sustainable Development and Social Change

Fall 2012

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## **Table of Contents:**

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
-Gender in India.....	5
-Education for Women.....	6
-Defining Gender.....	7
-Gender and the Classroom.....	7
-The Role of the Teacher.....	8
-Methodology.....	10
<b>Gender in Educational Policy</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Government-Run Teachers’ Trainings</b> .....	<b>13</b>
-Theoretical Model: DIETs, SSA.....	13
-Teacher Attitudes and Experiences.....	17
<b>Alternative Teachers’ Trainings</b> .....	<b>21</b>
- <i>Pravah</i> .....	21
-“Who Am I?”.....	22
- The World Is My Classroom.....	22
-Teacher Attitudes and Experiences.....	23
- <i>Nirantar</i> .....	26
<b>Discussion and Analysis</b> .....	<b>29</b>
-Government-Run Teacher Trainings.....	29
-Integrating Government and NGO Trainings.....	33
-Context.....	34
- Opportunities and Challenges.....	35
<b>Conclusions and Ways Forward</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Recommendations for Further Study</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> .....	<b>42</b>

## **Abstract**

*Education for girls in India has been a crucial area of study for the past 20 years; however, the main focus of attention has been on issues of girls' access to school only. This study moves beyond this, seeking to gain critical insight into how 'gender' is being understood within the classroom via teachers. Teachers' trainings conducted by the government and by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were examined through interviews with teachers and coordinators of teachers' trainings, along with experts on gender and feminism in Delhi and Jaipur, Rajasthan. These interviews focused on the content and quality of teachers' trainings, and their effects on teachers' attitudes towards teaching, perception of 'gender,' and understanding of self-identity. Study results show that government-run teachers' trainings are ineffective in creating a full understanding of 'gender,' and that much can be learned from trainings like those conducted by NGOs in expanding the discourse on gender to include feminist insights, and in creating teachers that are empowered, informed, self-aware citizens.*

## Introduction

### *Gender in India*

When examining India, it is impossible not to recognize a strong tradition of gender discrimination. Indicators such as literacy rates prove the pervasiveness of gender inequality, showing only 65.5% of women to be literate.<sup>1</sup> The tradition of patriarchy, a power structure where men hold a dominant status, has created and reinforced a binary of social roles that has resulted in subjugation and bias against women in all aspects of society. The dominance of a division between the public and private space, where only men are permitted in the public sphere, has created a “deep-seated cultural association with women and the institutions of marriage and family.”<sup>2</sup> Through culture and tradition, women have been fenced into a specific set of norms.

Women in India have been defined in many ways by what they represent. After India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947, the role of women in society began to shift. As men moved into an increasingly globalized world, the fear arose that they were becoming denationalized, that is, less essentially Indian. In reaction, the role of women was re-evaluated. “Indian womanhood and the home which she was seen to embody came to be viewed as one of the most important sites where the ‘essential marks of cultural identity’ were located and reproduced.”<sup>3</sup> Women became icons of national identity, symbols of a traditional India. This concept of female identity as being directly linked to the preservation of an iconic, conventional ‘Indianness’ is a powerful concept that has continued to influence the perception of gender roles in society, and the lives of women today.

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<sup>1</sup> (pg. 7) Bajaj, M., and Pathmaraja, M. (2011) *Engendering Agency: The Differentiated Impact of Educational Initiatives in Zambia and India*.

<sup>2</sup> (pg. 2) Bandyopadhyay, M. and Subrahmanian, R. (2008) *Gender Equity in Education: A review of Trends and Factors*.

<sup>3</sup> (pg. 135) Seth, S. (2008). *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*.

Social constructions like these are just one small example of the ways in which women have held, and continue to hold, a subordinate status in Indian society. Statistics on male and female mortality rates indicate that there are approximately 130 female deaths for every 100 male deaths in India.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Census Office of India estimated that in 1991, the sex ratio in India was 1,079 males for every 1,000 females,<sup>5</sup> the highest difference it has ever been. The factors that influence these statistics range from nutrition to access to medical facilities, but the evident gap shows a large difference in the way that men and women are being valued in Indian society.

### *Education for Women*

Gender inequality is propagated in many ways: through practices in the home such as division of labor and duties, as well as through public institutions like work environments, places of religious worship, and schools. In India for a long time, the classroom was a space reserved exclusively for boys: knowledge was seen as a privilege to which only those defined as male deserved access. Girls have been excluded from education in India because household duties prevented them from being available during “normal” school hours, and because importance was put on the education of boys. When girls were finally given limited access to schooling, the philosophy behind their education remained rooted in maintaining the social structure of patriarchy. Initially, the purpose of education for women was to remake her in the identity of the “true Indian woman,”<sup>6</sup> where her role continued as a bearer of national identity, specifically in the private sphere of the home. The assumption was “You educate the woman, you educate the family.”<sup>7</sup> Education for women was seen as a means to another end, not a goal in of itself. Though in the last few decades girls have received

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<sup>4</sup> (pg. 2) Kishor, S. (1993) “May God Give Sons to All”: Gender and Child Mortality in India.

<sup>5</sup> (pg. 1) Griffiths, P., Matthews, Z., and Hinde, A. (2000) Understanding the Sex Ratio in India: A Simulation Approach.

<sup>6</sup> (pg. 229) Bhog, D. (2005). Looking Beyond Schooling for Girls: The Gender Question in Education.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

increasing access to schools, their experience within these institutions continues to be inherently gendered.

### *Defining 'Gender'*

Under most circumstances, I would take a moment here to concretely define the term 'gender' as it will be used in this paper. However, through my research and discussions with professionals in the field, I have found that the meaning of the word is entirely contextual: it means different things to different people under different circumstances. So for now, I would like to define gender broadly as referring to the characteristics and roles differentiating male from female defined by a process of socialization, distinct from biological sex<sup>8</sup>, and historically significant in the context of hierarchy and power relations. This definition is presented with the caveat that many people in India work with varied, partial, or totally different definitions with various goals in mind. It is part of the mission of this paper to attempt to dissect some of those definitions, and understand the implications in institutions such as schools, and in the lives of many men and women.

### *Gender and the Classroom*

Gender is not something that is inherently known; it is a set of norms that people are socialized to accept. Therefore, it is important to look within a society to understand the mechanisms of socialization, and their influences on the society as a whole. There are many institutions that contribute to the socialization process of people – families, communities, institutions, and most importantly, schools. When understanding the importance of education, it is helpful to think of it as “the overall plan for the society itself”.<sup>9</sup> Deciding what is learned in school is in many ways an act of constructing an ideal vision for society, and constructing socialized citizens to fulfill this image. The Indian education system is no exception.

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<sup>8</sup> (pg. 66) Aesop, R., Fitzsimmons, A. and Lennon, K. (2005) *Theorizing Gender*.

<sup>9</sup> (pg. 19) Kumar, K. (2008). *A Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling*.



Classrooms act as a space where attitudes and ideas about both self and nation are created and propagated. When thinking about schooling, then, it is important also to focus on the possibilities of what education can do. In the work *Gender Equity in Education: a Review of Trends and Factors*, the authors assert that “education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialization, challenging conventional gender ideologies, leveling the playing field between males and females in relation to skills, credentials and qualification, and allowing women the use of knowledge to empower themselves in diverse ways.<sup>10</sup>” In the Indian context, this has powerful implications for equalizing gender roles through education. The idea that the classroom can provide a space in which gender hierarchy can be challenged and re-evaluated is essential to the understanding of gender within this study.

### *The Role of the Teacher*

The role of schools as a crucial space that creates and reiterates social realities is in large part dependent on the people that govern these spaces: teachers. Teachers play an incredibly important role in formulating how children conceive of themselves, acting as a communicator of values for “personal growth, on national issues, and social relations,”<sup>11</sup> and providing context with which the student can understand both themselves and the society they live in. Additionally, teachers are one of the first adult figures to significantly influence children’s lives outside of the family, and therefore have the vital responsibility of acting as a role model.<sup>12</sup> It is imperative, then, to examine the ways in which the teachers themselves understand the society around them, and in turn, how they transmit this information to their students, both in conscious and subconscious ways. This includes both the material that is being taught, and the information that is unconsciously communicated through actions and attitudes. The transmission of information relevant to gender most often happens through the

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<sup>10</sup> (pg. 3) Bandyopadhyay, M. and Subrahmanian, R

<sup>11</sup> (pg. 293) Sharma, N.(2011). *Value Education and Social Transformation*

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

second aspect: “getting your gender right, learning the ‘obvious’ or the ‘normal’ in terms of gender or sexual identity are an intrinsic part of the process of schooling.”<sup>13</sup> Gender socialization within school in India, unless consciously addressed, has the potential to reiterate the traditional patriarchal power structure, and limit the opportunities and choices of those involved. Therefore, the teacher’s awareness of his or her actions is a vital component in understanding the school as a mechanism for creating socialized beings.

But how do teachers become aware of the significance of their role? It follows logically that the preparation and continuing education of teachers should be of the utmost importance. The training of teachers should be comprehensive, providing information about sociological and psychological influences on students, and should prepare teachers to be sensitive on all aspects of gender issues.<sup>14</sup> They should empower teachers to critically evaluate their society, work to the best of their abilities to engage their students in the same process. However, many teacher trainings in India do not fulfill these goals.

The concept of gender in education is one that is under relatively recent scrutiny in India. Efforts are now being made at the government and civil society level to bring about changes in the education sector to promote gender equality on the ground level. To do this, the concept of gender is being brought into the training of teachers. The hope that teachers can become change agents within schools is built upon the significant and unique role that teachers play in society. While some research has been conducted on comparative access of boys and girls to schooling in India, almost no studies have been done to assess how gender

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<sup>13</sup> (pg. 21) Bhog, D., Mullick, D., Bharadwaj, P., & Sharma, J. (2009). *Gender in Education: Opening Up the Field*.

<sup>14</sup> (pg. 162) Agosin, M. (2005). *Women, Gender, and Human Rights: A Global Perspective*.

roles and definitions are being understood within school settings. Further, little to no information exists on the sociological understandings imparted by teacher trainings on the subject, as current institutions have no comprehensive evaluation system.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore and evaluate the content and quality of teachers' trainings in India specifically in relation gender. It focuses on the effects of these trainings on teachers' attitudes towards teaching, perception of 'gender' and understanding of self-identity. These themes all relate directly to the way that gender socialization processes are experienced by children in the classroom. Though the topic of gender in education deserves in-depth and comprehensive analysis, the scope of this project has limited the factors which can be assessed. Therefore, I have chosen to structure my study specifically around perceptions and attitudes surrounding the concept of 'gender' in the domain of teacher education. Research has been focused on the following questions: How is 'gender' being addressed and understood within government-run teacher trainings? How are alternative teacher trainings conducted, and in what ways do they address the concept of 'gender'? Finally, what implications do these definitions have for how teachers bring their own understandings into the classroom? These questions investigate attitudes and perceptions, and point towards important learning about the path towards gender equality within the classroom and beyond.

### *Methodology*

This study was conducted in two primary locations: New Delhi, and Jaipur, Rajasthan. In New Delhi, information on Non-Governmental Organization-run teacher trainings was gathered through personal interviews with coordinators, as well as through phone interviews

with teachers who had undergone the trainings. Interviews with several experts in the fields of gender and education also supplemented the understanding of the context of these trainings. In Jaipur, information on government-run teacher trainings was gathered through personal interviews with coordinators of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Program (SSA), and a lecturer from the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET). Teacher perspectives were gained through a day visit to Vidhani School, a government-run school on the outskirts of Jaipur, where eight teachers were interviewed on their perceptions of gender and experiences in trainings. In this paper, I will first introduce recent trends in educational policy and the ways in which gender is therein defined. I will then examine the findings within the government trainings studied, followed by the non-governmental trainings. Finally, I will provide a critical analysis of the way in which these two programs inform each other, and provide pathways forward for implementing gender education within teacher trainings in India.

### **Gender in Educational Policy**

In order to understand the state of education for women in India now, it is critical to understand how ‘gender’ is being conceptualized by the government. Discourse in policy has changed drastically in the past 50 years surrounding women and education. In her article in the *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Katherine Hay describes the shift: “education moved from being conceptualized as a ‘universal good’ at the time of independence (1947), to an instrument for population control in the 1960s, to a ‘right’ by the 1980s, and to a cornerstone of women’s ‘empowerment’ by the 1990s.”<sup>15</sup> This transformation in understanding shows both progress, and the re-affirmation of women’s education as instrumentalist<sup>16</sup>, that is, as

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<sup>15</sup> (pg. 327) Hay, K (2012). *Engendering Policies and Programmes through Feminist Evaluation: Opportunities and Insights*.

<sup>16</sup> Bhog, Dipta. Personal Interview.

being used for another end, in example as the national good of population control. Though the discourse shifted drastically and increasingly incorporated women's' rights as a central focus, as will be seen later, practices within the system continued to reinforce patriarchal norms. The complex and competing forces of tradition and progress can be seen in the continuing gap between policy and practice in India today.<sup>17</sup>

Brief highlights from the most recent policy reforms offer insight into the current goals and priorities at the national level. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) set forth in 2000 discusses gender in the following way:

“Equality among sexes is a fundamental right under the Constitution of India. Besides making education accessible to more and more girls, especially rural girls, removing all gender-discrimination and gender-bias in school curriculum is absolutely necessary. Moreover, it will be a most appropriate thing to recognize and nurture the best features of each gender in the best Indian Tradition. - ‘Context and Concerns’-NCF 2000”<sup>18</sup> .

In this small excerpt, the government presents two contradictory statements: the quest to remove all gender-bias and the need to nurture and maintain ‘the best features of each gender in the best Indian tradition.’ These two goals are fundamentally at odds because one aims for gender equality while the other reinforces the value of traditional gender roles rooted in unequal status. By creating a binary between features of gender in tradition, this policy implicitly perpetuates the hierarchical nature of gendered roles in India within the classroom.

In 2003, a bill was put out mandating Free and Compulsory Education for all children up to age 14.<sup>19</sup> This bill focuses on universalizing access to education regardless of sex, caste, or class. While this is an important step in alleviate inequalities between boys and girls in who is

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<sup>17</sup> (pg. 24) Stacki, Dr. Sandra (2002). *Women Teachers Empowered in India: Teachers Training through a Gender Lens*.

<sup>18</sup> (pg. 242) Bhog, D.

<sup>19</sup> (pg. 232) Bhog, D.

receiving education, the discourse on gender here focuses primarily on access to school, and with that comes an implicit assumption that access<sup>20</sup> will automatically lead to gender empowerment. The bill makes no mention of how the process of schooling will be altered to create an enabling environment for girls once they are within schools.<sup>21</sup>

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2005 attempted to address this problem. Within this framework, gender was addressed from a more holistic perspective, recognizing forces of hierarchy and power relations both within and outside of the classroom.<sup>22</sup> The Gender Focus Paper produced as a part of this discussion critically analyzed the ways in which information is transacted within the classroom, and questioned dominant forms of pedagogy. The Framework resulted in large-scale reforms of school textbooks to alleviate gender discrimination within school curriculum, but no link has been made between the changes made in the textbooks<sup>23</sup> and the understanding of teachers within the classroom.<sup>24</sup> This issue raises a larger question: in what ways is writing in policy reflected in changes being made on the ground? An in-depth look at teacher trainings on the theme of gender will help to answer this question.

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<sup>20</sup> It is important not to discount “access” as an important issue when thinking about girls and women in education. Many complex social, structural, and societal factors affect (and often limit) girls’ access to proper and equitable schooling. However, in considering policy, it must be recognized that girls schooling is often used as a means to a different end. The United Nations Development Program has identified female literacy as a significant marker of national development, spurring a push to get girls into school, but not looking at what happens once they are enrolled.

<sup>21</sup> (pg. 2) Bhog, D., Mullick, D., Bharadwaj, P., & Sharma, J.

<sup>22</sup> (pg. 45) (2005) NCF: National Curriculum Framework for School Education.

<sup>23</sup> In addressing this question, scholars are now also looking critically at the way that textbooks inform understandings of patriarchy and the socio-political construction of gender. Dominance of male-centric images and stories has been a prevalent finding in this study, and new research is being done to promote new images within the curricula. (Bhog and Mull, pg. 3) While this is an important aspect to consider, and is a crucial piece in beginning to understand the complex ways in which gendering happens within the classroom, it is not within the scope of this study.

<sup>24</sup> Sen, Ishani. Personal Interview.

## **Government-Run Teachers' Trainings**

### *Theoretical Models: DIETs and the SSA Program*

The training and preparation of government teachers in India is a responsibility shared by many institutions at different levels. On a broad scale, these trainings seek to provide support, capacity-building, and resources to teachers positioned at government schools. They also aim to raise awareness on issues of social justice such as gender, and sensitize teachers to their implications in the classroom. However, the concept of teacher training in India has been met with mixed reviews. While the government provides opportunities for training of teachers, it has been found in many cases that “on values and attitudes, the training process makes no impact<sup>25</sup>. It is these attitudes that this study hopes to better understand and address.

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus on an institution at the district level: the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), and a supporting program, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The role of the DIET is to provide support, guidance, monitoring, and training to all teachers working in government schools in their district.<sup>26</sup> Working under the framework of Universalization of Education, DIETs have set forth specific goals to include those from socially disadvantaged groups, including women and girls.<sup>27</sup> The majority of the teacher trainings focus on subject-specific learning and new methodology; however, there is a two day in-service program that focuses solely on ‘gender.’ So what does this training involve, and who gets to participate?

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<sup>25</sup> (pg. 40) Kumar, K.

<sup>26</sup> Karunakar, Bindu. Personal Interview.

<sup>27</sup> (n.d) District Institute for Education and Training.

According to Abhishek Bacholi, a lecturer in the DIETs of Jaipur, the gender trainings are focused almost exclusively on female teachers. During the two day training, experts come in to discuss the psychological and physical changes that come as a result of adolescence. Mr. Bacholi highlights the interaction: “The female teachers will discuss with that lady doctor or that lady educationist. We also leave that. They are free to do. They can ask their problems, discuss their problems. Exchange their views also, everything.”<sup>28</sup> Here, it is clear that gender is defined exclusively as physical problems relevant only to the biological status of being a woman. He later specified that the ‘lady doctor’ was usually a female gynecologist. Trainings like these highlight topics like hygiene, and are conducted exclusively with female teachers. Though the training does provide a space for female teachers to “exchange their views,” its scope is limited by who can participate (only women) and the subject matter covered.

But first, it must be recognized that DIET teacher training programs do not work in isolation, and in general are not working to their fullest capacity. Bindu Karunakar, the Deputy Commissioner of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Program, explains that while the DIET is supposed to be “very strong” in the training of teachers, there is a “huge vacancy”<sup>29</sup> in terms of actual implementation. This is where the SSA Program comes in. The SSA Program serves as a temporary resource center that intervenes at the district level where programs like DIETs are not doing their job. While Mr. Bacholi cited a completion of 3,310 teachers trained for the 2012/2013 year<sup>30</sup>, Ms. Karunakar estimated that the SSA Program trains a minimum of 75,000 teachers during the summer holidays alone. This comparison provides a small insight into the real impact of each of these trainings. These two institutions work in conjunction with each other to train government teachers, but have slightly different purposes and goals.

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<sup>28</sup> Bacholi, Abhishek. Personal Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Karunakar, Bindu. Personal Interview.

<sup>30</sup> (Bacholi, Abhishek. Personal Interview.



Though the SSA Program's fundamental purpose is to further the goals of the Universalization of Elementary Education<sup>31</sup>, the mission statement shows a theoretical dedication to teacher training as well:

“Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs.”<sup>32</sup>

The SSA's self-published evaluation of their teacher training program claims that the trainings emphasize child-centered pedagogy and activity-based teaching learning,<sup>33</sup> and encourage teachers to incorporate new methodologies into the classroom. Like the DIET programs, SSA provides a three day in-service training whose topic is 'gender'<sup>34</sup>. According to Ms. Shuchi Kaushik, the coordinator of the gender program for SSA, in these trainings they discuss: “the history of gender, background of gender, understanding of gender, and the role of males and females in society, and then we further go on to things related to school, classroom, and the domestic environment.”<sup>35</sup> Here, it is clear that the way of discussing gender has moved beyond the biological basis covered in the DIET trainings to an understanding of gender as involving social roles, and being relevant in many different environments. However, theoretical understandings of these trainings can only provide a partial picture of how gender is being taught in government teacher trainings. The experiences of teachers can help to illuminate the reality of implementation of trainings on a ground level, and provide substantiation for their effectiveness.

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<sup>31</sup> (pg. 23) Dyer, C. (2005). Decentralisation to improve teacher quality? District Institutes of Education and Training in India.

<sup>32</sup> (2007) Ministry of Human Resource Development: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

<sup>33</sup> (pg. 1) (2011) Progress of Teacher Training under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

<sup>34</sup> (pg. 46)(2000) NCERT, citing *DPEP report, 2000*,

<sup>35</sup> Kaushik, Shuchi. Personal Interview.

### *Teacher Attitudes and Experiences*

The attitudes of teachers in government teaching positions show problems on many levels. First, the interest levels surrounding the positions are extremely low: with posts either lying empty, or with teachers being forcibly assigned and transferred.<sup>36</sup> Many involved do not understand their involvement with DIETs, and certainly do not have a desire to teach. Secondly, teachers' attitudes towards any sort of training have been found to be extremely negative. In her article "*Decentralisation to improve teacher quality? District Institutes of Education and Training in India*," Caroline Dyer conducted an in-depth study of 6 DIETs and their effectiveness. Through this, she concluded that on the whole, teachers were "unmotivated, uncommitted and uninterested in training."<sup>37</sup> Teachers have been found to simply write down their names to show they attended, and then leave the training. Even if they do stay, engagement is often low due to the prevalent lecture method practices in many of these trainings. Dipta Bhog, founder of Nirantar, elaborated on her experience of working with government-run trainings, claiming that "you record your physical presence, not your mental presence."<sup>38</sup> Both Bindu Karunakar (of SSA) and Abhishek Bacholi (of DIET) reflected in similar ways about their experiences in training teachers. "We have to instill: 'we are not by chance teacher, we are by choice teacher'"<sup>39</sup> said Bacholi vehemently. This negative and apathetic view of the teaching profession is a phenomenon that can be seen prevalently across India; in his book *A Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling*, Krishna Kumar notes that "school teachers are not considered an intellectual workforce in our

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<sup>36</sup> (pg. 21) Dyer, C. (2005). *Decentralisation to improve teacher quality? District Institutes of Education and Training in India*.

<sup>37</sup> (pg. 22) Dyer, C.

<sup>38</sup> Bhog, Dipta. Personal Interview.

<sup>39</sup> Bacholi, Abhishek. Personal Interview.

country.”<sup>40</sup> This negative attitude towards the occupation is one of the concerns that must be addressed regarding teachers’ trainings.

When asked about their trainings, teachers all expressed similar sentiments about their most significant learning. They highlighted methods of teaching, such as use of materials, games, and other interactive components as being the primary learning outcome of the trainings.

When asked about a gender component, most mentioned brief discussions on child psychology. It was only through probing more into their own views about gender that showed the ways in which their training had influenced (or failed to influence) the way they saw gender.

Eight teachers were interviewed about their perceptions of gender, and their reactions exhibited several significant trends. First was the view that boys and girls are equal within their classroom, and that no gender discrimination exists within schools. All teachers stressed that they treat boys and girls the same in the classroom, and some extended this definition to include their home as well. On a broader scale, these teachers dismissed all forms of discrimination, including caste. When asked about the challenges that boys and girls face in life, one male teacher answered: “they face the same challenges, rural girls and boys have no problem.”<sup>41</sup> This dismissal of the different life experiences of boys and girls, and of discrimination in general shows a lack of understanding and sensitivity towards continuing problems in gender relations.

Several of the teachers recognized that gender discrimination existed within some Indian households, such as parents giving preference for boys to attend private schools over girls (a

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<sup>40</sup> (pg. 37) Krishna, K.

<sup>41</sup> Sharma, Sitaram, personal interview.

reality that highlights new ways in which gender discrimination is manifesting itself)<sup>42</sup>, but expressed the view that this was unrelated to what was happening within the classroom. One female teacher, who had not undergone any additional training since her first certification (Bachelors of Education) in 1986, said “education is based only on aims. It is not about sex, or about rich/poor, it is a democracy. All are equal here.”<sup>43</sup> The same teacher mentioned, in relation to ‘gender,’ that “we don’t talk about it in school because the government doesn’t allow. We have neither time nor permission to discuss this.”<sup>44</sup> The views expressed by this teacher raise several important issues in the transaction of gender understanding to teachers – first, the importance of training for all teachers (and not just some teachers, as she had not received training for over 25 years), and second, within that training the recognition of relevance of gender influence within the classroom.

In terms of differences between boys and girls, teachers expressed opinions on different gender traits, characterizing girls as learning quickly, being more responsible, sincere and well-mannered, and boys as naughty and forgetful. Ideas about what roles boys and girls should occupy after school also mirrored a traditional framework: several teachers said that while girls should have a job, they should also take care of children and the house, whereas boys should focus on earning money and doing something meaningful for society. This shows that the understanding among government teachers of the differences between boys and girls stem from social roles and attributes that they find essential to gender identity, and are fixed within society.

The conversations with teachers and teacher training coordinators revealed that ‘gender’ in most cases is conceptualized in a very simplified way in government trainings, and this

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<sup>42</sup> (pg. 337) Hay, K.

<sup>43</sup> Sharma, Meena, personal interview.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

definition is perpetuated in schools. While all teachers understood the importance of eliminating gender discrimination on a surface level, their complete dismissal of it as a continuing issue highlights a lack of awareness. It was found that the coordinators in the SSA Program were more aware of the need for continued gender education than the coordinators in the DIET. While those involved with the DIET seemed satisfied with the gender trainings as being sufficient, those in SSA recognized the need for continued improvement. Bindu Karunakar explained it as an issue of time: “We are not addressing gender as such on a very high level. It should be there, but right now we have more priorities, other areas to work upon.”<sup>45</sup> These priorities will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this paper.

The views of the teachers interviewed also raises a more fundamental question: how many of these teachers are actually receiving training on gender at all? Several of the teachers spoken with acknowledged some discussion of gender, but many did not recognize this as being part of their training experience. It follows to question: though programs exist in theory, how effective is the government at implementing them on the ground level? A questionnaire for teachers in government schools conducted by Nirantar, an NGO that works in gender and education issues, revealed that in the last 8 years, teachers reported that they had not been given any gender trainings.<sup>46</sup> This issue necessitates further investigation, and highlights the gaps evident between educational policy and implementation. A deeper and more complex understanding of gender, one that moves beyond issues of access and basic social roles, is needed to begin to alleviate continued gender discrimination within government schools in India.

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<sup>45</sup> Karunakar, Bindu. personal interview.

<sup>46</sup> Bhog, Dipta. Personal Interview.

## **Alternative Teachers' Trainings: A Look at NGO examples**

Though the government provides a vast majority of teacher trainings currently being conducted in India, there are a host of programs through civil society that approach the education of teachers in alternative ways, and exhibit different ways of interacting with the government as well. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Pravah and Nirantar are working on innovative pilot programs that seek to provide teachers with training that is holistic, in-depth, and inclusive. This study sought to better understand their progressive work, and looked towards their example for re-evaluating government trainings.

### ***Pravah***

Pravah is an organization based in New Delhi whose primary focus is on youth development and empowerment. The reason for their involvement in the sector of teacher training is this: they sought to empower young people in a systemic way, and so they looked at institutions where youth were being most directly being influenced. “We walked into the places that youth belonged. So that would be school, that would be a college, and eventually those stakeholders who worked with youth: teachers.”<sup>47</sup> The Pravah Teacher Training program addresses teachers in two ways: through workshops for pre-service teachers (that is, before they have begun working) as a part of their coursework in the Bachelors of Elementary Education program (B. El.Ed) through the state, and through in-service training workshops directed at teachers who are already involved in the profession. Though the former will briefly be discussed, I will focus my primary attention on the latter.

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<sup>47</sup> Roychowdhury, Purna. Personal Interview.

### *“Who Am I?”*

Within the B.El.Ed program, teachers participate in a Pravah-run workshop entitled “Who Am I?” This workshop offers a space for teachers to discuss their own lives and experiences, and to critically examine factors that have affected their own development. The topic of gender comes up explicitly in these conversations because of the prevalence of female teachers in the trainings, and it is discussed as permeating many different aspects of their lives. Purna Roychowdhury, one of the coordinators of the program, explains some of the topics that are explored as things that are “covered in the umbrella of rituals, or traditions, or a thing that has been happening for years, so it doesn’t register in our minds that this at all is an issue,”<sup>48</sup> and reveals how in the program they work to debunk and understand those influences. She asserted that “gender issues are so engrained at times that we don’t even identify it.”<sup>49</sup> Connecting and relating things experienced by teachers in their own lives such as traditions, and revealing their gendered nature, is a crucial aspect of this training. Roychowdhury said that the trainings are effective in tackling issues of gender because of the supportive group that is created throughout the training. Through extensive sharing, participants journey through each other’s life experiences together, and in this trusting environment, a dynamic is created that allows for honest re-evaluation of gender within their own lives.

### *The World Is My Classroom*

Currently, Pravah is also conducting an in-service training program entitled The World is My Classroom (TWMC). It is a six-day intensive training for teachers within private schools,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

followed by a three-month mentoring phase by Pravah coordinators. This breaks down into 50 hours of training, and 30 hours of internship/mentoring period.<sup>50</sup> Within the training itself, the focus is on three main components: teacher identity, conflict resolution, and instruction design and facilitation. Though the training is not focused explicitly on ‘gender,’ key aspects are integrated throughout the program that cause teachers to critically evaluate their own understanding of gender, and the way it relates to their position as an educator. The transformation of attitudes expressed by the teachers interviewed who underwent the training demonstrates the effectiveness with which gender is discussed and analyzed through these sessions.

### *Teacher Attitudes and Experiences*

An important trend in teacher attitudes in the trainings conducted by Pravah can best be understood as the theory of “unlearning.”<sup>51</sup> This means a process of critically examining what was already known by the teacher, and assessing flaws in understanding before then relearning in a more complex and multifaceted way. Coordinators of Pravah recognize this progression, and encourage it in their trainees. In TWMC, this was seen to happen most powerfully through self-reflection. Ishani Sen, coordinator of the program, explained that the value of self-reflection for teachers was based in the process of socialization that all humans undergo: “the teacher is also part of the society; you can’t teach what you haven’t worked on within *yourself*.”<sup>52</sup> With this, she recognizes how the identity of a teacher influences the creation of identity and self-image in children as well. In the training, each teacher is given time and space to reflect on their own experiences, explore themselves, and then think about the world outside of themselves with a new perspective. Ms. Roychowdhury comments:

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<sup>50</sup> Sen, Ishani. personal interview.

<sup>51</sup> Roychowdhury, Purna. personal interview.

<sup>52</sup> Sen, Ishani, personal interview.



“they’re dealing with their world, then going into a space, and helping the students deal with their world also.”<sup>53</sup>

The teachers interviewed expressed changes both in perspective and in how they approached teaching in the classroom. One teacher stressed the importance of bringing the issue of gender into all types of classrooms, not just in the humanities. As a science teacher, she said that the training helped her to “bridge the gap between science and social science,”<sup>54</sup> and she felt she now had the capacity to move beyond her own classroom curricula and connect it to what was relevant in her student’s lives. She emphasized that when she teaches adolescents, it is very important to incorporate issues such as substance abuse and sexual education, because she felt that no one ever taught those things, and they were crucial to understand.<sup>55</sup> Another teacher also spoke of a transformation in her attitude towards bringing issues into the classroom: she expressed that though she was sensitive to gender issues before the training, afterwards, she felt the need to make a conscious effort to sensitize students also, and focused on it explicitly during school time.<sup>56</sup>

Teachers also spoke of the concept of empowerment, both within their own lives and in the lives of their students. One teacher claimed that before the training, she felt hesitant, but afterwards, she felt that she had a voice, and could represent herself with confidence both in the classroom and in interactions with other teachers. She even shared her new knowledge with other colleagues, and persuaded other teachers to undergo the training as well.<sup>57</sup> Another teacher revealed that she felt it was important to provide special messages to the girls in the classroom, as they might be facing unique challenges. Her values that she taught to girls

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<sup>53</sup> Roychowdhury, Purna. personal interview.

<sup>54</sup> Bose, Nivedita, personal interview.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Sinha, Anuradha, personal interview.

<sup>57</sup> Shankar, Padma. Personal Interview.

centered on their academics, and furthering their careers and identities as strong, independent women in Indian society through education: “We also talk to girls in the classroom – I tell them that they have to have strength, and focus on their studies, because that is the only way to have an identity in this society, otherwise everything is wasted.”<sup>58</sup> This ability to recognize the challenges within the lives of students directly in relation to their gender identity, and consciously discuss it with the students, is a testament to the training’s success in imparting a deep understanding of gender constructions in society, and in providing teachers with the capacity to effectively address this in the setting of the classroom.

Anuradha Sinha, a teacher at the Delhi Police Public school who underwent TWMC, expressed that through the trainings, she came to understand the importance of being a role model for her students. She said: “you live the value. They will catch onto the role they see in you.”<sup>59</sup> In speaking more with her, Ms. Sinha also revealed a deeper understanding of gender by breaking down stereotypes surrounding gender and teachers. She challenged the assumption that female teachers were automatically more sensitive than male teachers, stating that some male teachers she had met connected very well with students, while some female teachers “couldn’t be bothered.”<sup>60</sup> Through this, she demonstrates her understanding of the gendered stereotypes surrounding teachers as well, and recognizes the diversity within each category of teacher. She also recognized that gender stereotypes continue within the classroom as well. She explained that she felt that many of the male students in her classes still held assumptions about what jobs girls should and should not do. Though the students spoke about this only in a playful manner, she recognized that “you cannot joke about something that is not in your mind.”<sup>61</sup> This awareness of attitudes within the classroom shows

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<sup>58</sup> Choudhary, Santosh. Personal Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Sinha, Anuradha. Personal Interview.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

a keen sensitivity to roles established by gender discrimination, and an understanding of the ways in which this continues to be problematic within the classroom.

Although it was not possible in the scope of this study to interview a wide sampling of teachers from the Pravah trainings, an evaluation conducted in 2010 of several different aspects of the teacher trainings helps to provide legitimacy to the preceding claims. This evaluation used a broad range of methodologies, including quantitative questionnaires, teacher self-assessment, observation, and interview. The findings indicate positive shifts in attitudes of teachers, students, and the wider school ethos. Specifically, the evaluation found that 85.71% of teachers reported improvement in addressing social justice issues in their classrooms,<sup>62</sup> including issues surrounding gender. The rest of the evaluation cites attitudes that are consistent with those expressed in this study. Particularly, 100% of teachers expressed positive change in the parameters of respect for diversity, personal growth, and openness to learning.<sup>63</sup> The teacher's status of role model within the classroom makes these aspects essential in the transaction of gender values. While the report also highlighted ways in which Pravah can continue to improve, such as gaining access to a broader range of schools and increased facilitator engagement with issues post-training, as a whole it confirmed the efficacy of the training in broadening teachers' understanding of themselves, their schools, and their society.

### *Nirantar*

The second non-governmental organization that can be looked towards as providing alternative methods of teacher training on gender is Nirantar. Like Pravah, Nirantar is also

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<sup>62</sup> (pg. 31) Mehotra, D. (2010) Pravah: Participatory Evaluation.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

based in New Delhi; however, their focus is more specifically on the field of gender and education. Though contact with teachers who participated in Nirantar trainings was not possible as part of the scope of this project, the discourse that the organization employs on gender is vital to gain a complete picture of the possibilities for discussion of gender in teacher trainings. Nirantar works with teacher trainings on several levels: in orientations for master trainers and government coordinators, in brief sessions with teachers through DIETs and the SSA program, and through large scale direct trainings with teachers. Their position is unique because they work both within private institutions and within the government – allowing for unique insight into training in both contexts.

The trainings conducted by those in Nirantar focus almost exclusively on issues surrounding gender, so the way that they define ‘gender’ carries a lot of weight in the message they convey in their training interventions. First, they seek to link gender with issues of power, patriarchy, and hierarchy.<sup>64</sup> To put this within a framework, they define “the body as also being socially constructed, and not a natural product.”<sup>65</sup> Dipta Bhog, one of the founders of Nirantar, comments that in her experience of gender education, most people just discuss it in terms of the classic sex/gender divide and mention the division of traditional social roles, but fail to move beyond that understanding. This is where Nirantar goes further; they actively seek to create an understanding of gender as directly linked to larger understandings of equity and equality.

The core aspect of the equity framework that Nirantar creates is based in debunking the concept of gender as a biological reality. This can be seen in their goal to include all people

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<sup>64</sup> Bhog, Dipta. personal interview.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

in the conversation about gender issues, not just girls and women. Ms. Bhog challenges the separation of gender as being only a women's issue:

“If you don't have an equity framework, you can't understand gender. Then your vision is really flat. You're actually implicitly looking at it as a biological construction, it's the biology of it, and then you just focus on the women and girls, because biologically they are belonging to their gender, and then you are biologically going forward, and saying 'ok, because you're biologically like that, we should come into the school and you should sit in the classroom, and you should have ten years of education. What they should learn, what they should become, that is the question that you need to answer.’<sup>66</sup>

Here, she shows a deep understanding of the forces that act upon women as a result of being categorized by a biological construction of gender, and the ways in which this definition affects views in society on the appropriate role of education for girls. Knowledge about equity for teachers would allow them to question the norms created by that construction, and would reveal that the conversation about gender needs to include everyone, not just women.

In their trainings, Nirantar challenges the dominant discourse on gender at every level. They recognize that a biological or social understanding is not sufficient in creating the change necessary to alleviate the inequalities still experienced by so many girls within the classroom. Instead, they define gender as a political term, one that is used to further specific agendas, and that has efficacy for different groups of people under different circumstances. Ms. Bhog argues that in recent years, 'gender' has become de-politicized in India as formal equality has become a necessity through the Universalization of Education.<sup>67</sup> Since the issue of access has been at the forefront of the conversation on 'gender,' now that access has in many ways been achieved, the government no longer feels an obligation to address what is defined there as 'gender.' This leaves out a critical topic: the experience of girls in education, and the purpose of their education as it is understood in society. Through their trainings, Nirantar seeks to re-politicize the term by addressing all of these underrepresented issues.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The goal of the trainings through Nirantar is to create a “good feminist teacher”<sup>68</sup> – a self-reflective person who listens to their students, provides them with information about society and the power relations inherent within it, and gives them resources for navigating within that society. Within the trainings, women especially were able to make large steps toward this goal because they began to see their own gendering, and could reflect on how the system created this within their lives. Still, Ms. Bhog recognizes that on a whole, the Indian system of teacher education is not currently moving towards that goal. Continued efforts must be taken to integrate practices such as those demonstrated in Nirantar in order to achieve a gendered understanding within the classroom.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### *Problems in Government-Run Teacher Trainings*

The training of teachers in India is a vast and complex area of study, but distinct trends can be seen in the treatment of ‘gender’ within government-run trainings and those conducted by NGOs. Through this study, it was seen that ‘gender’ was conceptualized by government teachers in the following ways: as a biological fact, as a theory to explain the differentiation of social roles in society, and as a historical source for discrimination that no longer has relevance in contemporary society. All of these definitions are problematic, as they do not present a complete understanding of the continuing influence of gender in Indian society.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

The training on gender conducted through the DIET of Jaipur reveals part of how gender is defined in many of these government trainings: as being about sex - being biologically linked and grounded, and as a sphere that is only relevant to women. By choosing this focus, the program neglects to understand gender as a social construct, and reaffirms boundaries surrounding the understanding of gender as biological. Although it is necessary for teachers to also be informed about medical needs specific to being a woman, the understanding of gender should not stop there.

Distinct focus on theory within these trainings is also not sufficient in creating a complete understanding of the way to approach gender within the classroom. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), conducted in 2005, is the most comprehensive analysis on the subject at present. The Gender Focus Paper that was written as part of the NCF 2005 cited this observation about the content of current gender trainings: “More lecture, fact, and information based sessions lead to teachers viewing gender as a formal, mechanical aspect of the principal of equality.”<sup>69</sup> The trainings conducted by both the DIET and the SSA Program, and the perceptions that were observed about equality reflect this formal understanding of gender. The teachers who said that “boys and girls, all are equal here”<sup>70</sup> is an example of this phenomenon. Though these gender trainings for teachers are a step in the right direction towards creating gender equality within the classroom, this theory-based approach stops short of allowing teachers to gain a more complex understanding of ‘gender’ as a social construct through active analysis of their own lives, and prohibits them from imparting this knowledge to their students.

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<sup>69</sup> (pg. 46) NCERT Position Paper.

<sup>70</sup> Sharma, Meena. Personal Interview.

The teachers' view of gender discrimination as non-existent within the classroom and the home, and gender as being a topic that is irrelevant in the space of the classroom also presents a problem. Though the gender trainings appear to present a surface-level of definition of the historical connotations of gender, they fail to address the way in which gender inequality persists in subtle acts of socialization, specifically in the classroom. Part of this understanding of socialization should come from inquiry into ones' own life, and reflection on life experiences relevant to gender. The training provided by the government does not provide space for this. The NCF 2005 identified this as a significant issue in the current trainings:

“Teachers’ trainings, courses and refresher programmes introduce theories of learning and information as abstract, atomized knowledge creating no space for teachers to undergo a transformative experience themselves – of reading theory in a personalized way. This translates into teacher’s being unable to re-conceptualize school knowledge, nor are they able to integrate experience with content.”<sup>71</sup>

From this evaluation, it is clear that teachers have not been given the capacity to recognize gender on a deep level within themselves, and as a result cannot connect the theory being transacted from the trainings into their experiences in the classroom. Findings in this study support this observation. When female teacher Sunita Sharma of the Vidhani Government School was asked if the trainings she underwent changed the way she thought about her identity as a woman or addressed the subject in any way, she emphatically said “No.”<sup>72</sup> This shows that the training did not provide guidance in the important act of self-reflection when thinking about gender.

So where does this deficiency in the government gender training come from? As shown from the reports through the NCF 2005, there is some awareness of the ways in which trainings are not properly engaging with the definition of gender. The NCF's Gender Focus Paper goes on to state that “developing a gender perspective through teacher education necessarily requires

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<sup>71</sup> (2005) NCF: National Curriculum Framework for School Education.

<sup>72</sup> Sharma, Sunita. Personal Interview.



a pedagogic approach that allows not just systematic study of gender theory but also an engagement within their own position in society vis a vis gender roles.”<sup>73</sup> Comparing the recent literature like this and the experiences and attitudes of government teachers shows that there is a gap between claims being made on the policy level, and the actualization of these claims within on the ground reforms. In her article *Women Teachers Empowered in India: Teacher Training through a Gender Lens*, writer for UNICEF Sandra Stacki states that:

“a stark contradiction has remained between policy commitments to women's equality and actual reform. Little real change has occurred despite the clear articulation by Indian educational policy and planning of what is necessary to create democratically structured programmes that will facilitate gender sensitivity and equity.”<sup>74</sup>

Her demonstration of the break between the articulation of gender in policy and actual implementation shows one of defining reasons for the problems found in government teacher trainings through this study.

It is important to question why this implementation is not occurring. The governmental view of gender equality as being achieved by equality in access to school may provide a partial answer. Part of the problem is that “without providing for real learning to take place within the school, mere infrastructure and enrolment would result in new hierarchies of access: an access to school but not to learning.”<sup>75</sup> Additionally, recognizing the fundamental purpose of education can provide some insight into why the problem exists on a larger scale. If the purpose of education is to create ideal socialized citizens, in what ways is patriarchy being re-articulated within the education system through its policy? The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) asserted that gender equality in the classroom should be approached in a “spirit of cooperation with the other sex, and not confrontation.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> (2005) NCF: National Curriculum Framework for School Education.

<sup>74</sup> (pg. 26) Stacki, Dr. Sandra.

<sup>75</sup> (pg. 230) Bhog, Dipta.

<sup>76</sup> (pg. 8) Bhog, D., Mullick, D., Bharadwaj, P., & Sharma, J.

Does this mean that questioning gender and hierarchy within schools has the potential to be a de-stabilizing influence in society, and to create conflict? Is there a possibility that the government is averse to reassessing gender as power relations because it could inspire conflict? When thinking about how gender is defined in government-run trainings, it must be considered that there are real political implications in the way gender is defined in policy and taught, and that these definitions may be dictated by larger social agendas influenced by strong traditions, such as that of patriarchy.

### *Integrating Government and NGO Training*

In looking for solutions, trainings conducted by NGOs in the field can serve as valuable models for effective ways to incorporate gender into teacher trainings in a comprehensive way, and provide a promising example for how government-run teacher trainings can be improved. The trainings run by Pravah and Nirantar provided teachers with the capacity to first critically examine themselves, and through that new understanding come to an understanding of gender as a sociological construct with hierarchical power implications that had weight in the present day and in their classrooms.

One of the most important aspects of the programs that were observed through this study was the emphasis on self-reflection. Both Pravah and Nirantar focused explicitly on creating time in trainings for teachers to discuss and analyze their own experiences, and to look at the way that constructions of gender have affected their lives. This aspect of the training is critical in preparing teachers to address gender issues in their classrooms in a sensitive manner because it creates self-awareness, and positions them as positive role models for their students. From the sample interviewed, it is clear that the trainings in Pravah had the effect of creating

empowered, confident female teachers. In many aspects of society, girls receive social cues such as submissive behavior that reinforce traditional forms of patriarchy. If girls in the classroom are exposed to an alternate example through their teacher, this could have a powerful effect on the way they view themselves in society. Incorporation of a module such as this into the government teacher training curriculum that focuses on understanding of self and understanding of the process of socialization would allow government teachers to move beyond surface-level definitions of gender. Creating an ethos of aware, empowered citizens in the teaching profession through engaging trainings is crucial to moving towards gender equity within society.

Both NGOs also presented ‘gender’ in their trainings as a socially constructed hierarchical power relationship that had a continuing effect on the lives of their students. This definition was articulated by many involved in the programs as being a distinctly feminist perspective on gender in India, and this label should be included in the discussion of the topic. They addressed the way that ‘gender’ is constructed in society, and stressed the importance of active citizenship in discussing these connections with their students. This is crucial to the complete gender education of a teacher because it emphasizes the teacher’s responsibility within the socializing space of the classroom, and through awareness-raising trainings, reduces the potential of reinforcing damaging gender stereotypes and social roles in school.<sup>77</sup> This level of understanding needs to be integrated into the definition used within government trainings as well.

The key difference between the discourse on gender in the government trainings and the trainings conducted by NGOs is the presence of a feminist discourse and evaluation. The

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<sup>77</sup> (pg. 1615) Ghose, M. (2002). *Literacy, Power, and Feminism*.

reason that this should be incorporated into government training curriculum is because “gender approaches might identify or record the differences between men and women, while feminist evaluations would explore *why* these differences exist and ‘challenge women’s subordinate position.’”<sup>78</sup> A feminist perspective on gender in India would allow for the questioning of essential social structures, and only from there can true gender equality be reached.

### *Context*

It is easy to make broad generalizations about the differences in understanding found in the government trainings and the NGO-run teacher trainings, and to judge harshly based on this stark contrast. But what is crucial to understand in any situation, and particularly in this one, is the importance of context, and how much situation, location, and circumstance can profoundly affect understandings. One of the teachers I spoke with through Pravah’s teacher trainings recognized this difference: she explained that because she is at a private school in Delhi, there isn’t much question of gender inequality. In the rural areas of India, she emphasized that gender discrimination is much more of an issue, but that in her urban setting, it was distinctly less. In her analysis she highlights two importance differences that must be recognized in this study: location (that is, an urban versus a rural setting) and institution (a private school versus a government-run one). Within these contexts, the factors that cause the difference in understanding of gender are not limited to teacher trainings, but encompass access to resources, knowledge, and values. Simply saying that a feminist agenda should be included in governmental teacher trainings would be ignoring all these other factors, and over-simplifying a very complicated problem. My project then in some ways looked at two ends of the spectrum: the on-the-ground realities in rural, conservative India, and the

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<sup>78</sup> (pg. 323) Hay, K.

privileged education of the elite teachers in an urban metropolis. The gap in the understanding of gender between these two places raises larger questions about access to information, resources, and rights, and presents no easy solutions. However, some work can be done within teacher trainings to work towards narrowing this gap and moving towards gender equality.

### *Opportunities and Challenges*

As stated earlier, the incorporation of lessons from NGO gender trainings into government teacher trainings would significantly enhance the discourse on gender. This study presents an opportunity for collaboration among NGOs and government institutions - the use of NGO expertise to most creatively and effectively conduct government trainings could significantly improve the way in which gender is being discussed and understood by government teachers. However, there are significant challenges that arise in attempting to transact this type of training in the government setting. One concern is the number of teachers to be trained: while Pravah worked with less than 40 teachers at a time and had significant time to devote to their training, trainings through the DIET and SSA program have to reach thousands of teachers, and often with very little time. Supplementing this issue is the problem of limited resources and funds available to devote to trainings, as the government has many other priorities concerning basic welfare and human rights. Both of these factors show that what the government can feasibly do is limited. Further, it must be recognized that changing the attitudes of teachers is not something that one training will automatically achieve: it is a slow process that can only begin to question engrained practices and views. However, collaboration and use of expertise among NGO and government-run teacher trainings is an important step in moving towards schooling where equality doesn't stop at who can walk into the classroom, but includes everything that is happening within the classroom as well.

### *Conclusions and Ways Forward*

Through this study, it was found that gender trainings conducted by the DIET and SSA program studied only provide a partial definition of gender grounded in biology and the reaffirmation of social roles. The perpetuation of partial definitions of gender within government schools has the potential to be damaging for Indian society because a lack of full information limits citizens' ability to question the social systems of which they are a part. The power of a deep, comprehensive, and fundamentally feminist understanding of gender like the one used in NGO-run teacher trainings is clear precisely for this reason: it allows teachers to question the social and political construction of gender in their own lives, and debunk it for their students as well. With this in mind, it becomes clear that when thinking about gender equality in schools, education can no longer be seen as an end in of itself, but should be re-envisioned as a tool for empowerment and as a means for creating a truly egalitarian society.

### *Recommendations for Further Study*

In conducting research on this topic, I quickly became frustrated by the little information I was able to find that moved beyond statistical analyses of male and female access to schools in India. From speaking with Dipta Bhog, an expert in the subject, it became clear that studies that seek to understand “the nature of classroom transaction and its role in constructing masculine and feminine identities are rare if not altogether absent.”<sup>79</sup> This kind of research is the next step in understanding how gender is experienced in schools. It is clear that what is needed is a detailed anthropological and sociological study of what is happening in the classroom in terms of gender. This paper was able just to skim the surface; a comprehensive analysis of attitudes and experiences of both teachers and students would contribute significantly to this area of study.

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<sup>79</sup> (pg. 2) Bhog, D., Mullick, D., Bharadwaj, P., & Sharma, J

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## **Appendix 1:**

### Questions for Interviews with Government School Teachers:

#### Section one: background and Teacher Training experience:

- 1) How long have you been teaching?
- 2) What made you decide to become a teacher?
- 3) Have you undergone Teacher Trainings? If so, which ones?
  - a.) Were any of these under the Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan program?
- 4) What was your most important learning from this training? OR What do you remember most about the training?
- 5) Do you feel it helped you? In what ways?
- 6) In what ways did it change the way you teach?
- 7) Did it change the way you think about your identity as a woman in India? (IA)

#### Section Two: classroom behavior and gender dynamics

- 1) In the classroom, do you treat boys and girls differently? If so, Why?
- 2) Who do you think participates/speaks more in the classroom, boys or girls? Why?
- 3) What do you see as the difference between boys and girls? (Is it biological, social, or both?) How do you think their lives are different? Do they face different challenges?
- 4) Do you think it is important for girls to go to school? Why?
- 5) What do you think girls should do after their education is over? Boys?
- 6) What messages/ values do you hope to impart to your students? Is this different for boys/ girls?
- 7) How do you feel in the classroom when a student challenges you?
- 8) Did the trainings you went through change your ideas about any of these questions?

## **Appendix 2:**

### Questions for Phone-Interviews with Pravah Teachers:

- 1) Why did/do you want to become a teacher?
- 2) What trainings did you undergo through Pravah? Did you find them meaningful?
- 3) What do you think is the difference between boys and girls? Is it biological, social, or both?
- 4) Before undergoing the Pravah Teacher Training “The World is My Classroom,” how did you treat boys and girls in the classroom?
- 5) Before undergoing the Pravah Teacher Training “The World is My Classroom,” what did you understand about the concept of gender?
- 6) Based on your experience in the TWMC training with Pravah, what is your understanding of gender now? How has it changed?
- 7) Has this changed the way you plan to teach? In what ways? For example, how do you plan to treat boys and girls in the classroom?
- 8) How do you see the concept of “gender” as being important in every day interactions in the classroom? How do you see your role as a teacher fitting into this?
- 9) Through this training, in what ways have your own thoughts changed about your life as a woman in India? How have you applied this to your teaching?
- 10) What messages or values do you hope to impart to your students?