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UNIT II

Gender Sensitisation I

A Note to the Teachers

Unit II in Semester V and Unit V in Semester VI are based on the broad theme of gender. The texts and the additional reading material included in the units deal with various aspects of gender, such as gender norms, gender roles, gender stereotyping, gender bias and so on. The overall aim of the units is to sensitise students to the imperative need for gender equality and to promote respect for difference. The following theoretical and contextual information, it is hoped, will help the teachers teach the units effectively.

Although sex, gender and sexuality are related, they are distinct from one another. 'Sex' describes biological traits that distinguish the 'male' from the 'female'. 'Gender', on the other hand, refers to how a person lives within society by learning the socio-cultural characteristics associated with being male or female. Sex is what you are born as while gender is what you become. In other words, you inherit your sex, but you learn your gender as you acquire the behaviour and attitude considered appropriate for your sex by your society and culture.

The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's famous formulation, "One is not born, but becomes a woman," distinguishes sex from gender and helps us to separate the natural fact of anatomical difference from the socio-cultural meaning attributed to that difference. Distinguishing between sex and gender enables us to recognise how the biological difference between males and females is made into a basis for social distinction and hierarchisation, and for assigning different and often discriminatory roles and stereotypical behaviours to men and women. Gender stereotyping harms both women and men, even if not equally. However, if we understand gender not as a binary (female/male) but rather as a spectrum (of biological, mental and emotional traits that exist along a continuum), we would realise that it is just as natural for men to have 'womanly' characteristics (such as affection, kindness, sensitivity, nurturance) as it is for women to exhibit 'manly' qualities (such as assertion, control, confidence).

Sigmund Freud, regarded as the 'father' of psychoanalysis, claimed that "anatomy is destiny"; that one's personality is determined by one's biology. But the belief that gender is composed of two distinct and opposite genders (female and male) in which there is no overlap is now proved to be neither scientifically nor medically correct. There is enough evidence today to show that personalities and behaviours are conditioned not so much

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UNIT V

Gender Sensitisation II

Poem: Accomplishments

Elizabeth Ralph Mertz

Pre-reading Activity

- When a child cries, whom do you expect to respond first, the child's father or mother?
- Between a man and woman, whom do you expect to go out and work and whom do you expect to stay at home?
- When someone refers to a nurse or a teacher, do you imagine the person being referred to as a man or a woman? Similarly, when there is a reference to an engineer or a scientist, do you think of the person to be a man or a woman?
- Many women describe themselves as 'just a housewife' or as 'only a housewife'. Have you ever heard a man, even if unemployed, describe himself as a 'househusband'?
- How common is it to see women work outside home? And how common is it to see men do housework?
- "Behind every successful man there stands a woman" is a familiar saying. Did you ever wonder why there is no such saying about a successful woman?

About the Author

Elizabeth Mertz is a professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School, where she teaches family law courses. She is a leading linguistic and legal anthropologist and a pioneer in the field of law and language. While her early research focused on language, identity and politics in Cape Breton Island in Canada, her later research examines the language of US legal education. Her publications include *The Language of Law School: Learning to "Think" Like a Lawyer* (2007).

About the Poem

First published in *Radcliffe Quarterly* (1975), "Accomplishments" deals with gender roles and in a humorous manner highlights the differential expectations for mothers and fathers.