



REPORT

हम सब Equal

AKSHARA' S GENDER CURRICULUM AND TRAINING

MUMBAI 2022

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Educational Institutes and Gender Equality

India has one of the largest network of educational institutes which caters to students wanting to get degrees and diplomas in a variety of subjects. Amongst them are students who opt for vocational training. They join govt or private ITI s after their SSC or after completion of Junior College. Enrolment in women-only ITIs has doubled since their inception. Women are usually concentrated in occupations such as dressmaking, computer operating, or fashion designing with less than 5% enrolled in engineering-related courses [Ernest and Young, 2020].

Aksharacentre has been engaging students in different colleges and from various subjects since the past 2 decades. Whilst working on the issue of women's livelihood, we were drawn towards the ITI s as they specifically train students in skills. Like the United Nations' 5th Sustainable Development Goal, we believe that the empowerment of women can take place if we go towards building an education system which is gender-equitable, empowers women and sensitizes men. Students of vocational education and training centres have little exposure to gender issues and concepts as their educational processes are focused on skills training.

Industrial Training Institutes were set up by the Indian Govt for students who wanted to learn particular technical and non-technical skills. Others who wanted a general 4-year education could opt for science, commerce, arts. There are about 14,779 govt. affiliated ITIs in the country [2021 data]. In Maharashtra, there are about 966 govt and private Industrial Training Institutes fielding as many as 1.5 lakh seats in around 91 courses ranging from women-oriented ones like beauty to plumbing and electrician courses. They might extend from 1 to 2 years given the nature of the course. Mumbai city has 13 ITI's.





Gender equality means that men and women in society have the same rights, resources and opportunities. In spite of our Constitution, favourable laws and wide spread educational system, gender inequality remains elusive in India. There have been some gains and losses in different issues and amongst different sets of people. There is considerable progress in reportage of violent crimes against women but the conviction rate is persistently low. There is more education amongst women but it is not being translated into employment. Their participation in the workforce is so low that it has become a major concern. Women are experiencing new freedoms but old gender norms and beliefs still persist. We need equality in society so all citizens are able to enjoy their rights regardless of their caste, class or ethnic group. Women, in all these identities, suffer from discriminations, deprivation and violence. In a society which is not gender equal, we lose the creativity and productivity of half our population. It is unfair and oppressive to have one section of society having more privileges and the right to violence over another section.

If we move from the macro and societal picture of gender inequality, to the micro one of educational institutes, especially students in ITIs, we will find several types of inequalities. Women lag behind in skill based and technical education and therefore when they join the job market they do not earn sufficiently well. Men who are their co students and workers are often perpetrators of sexual harassment which further discourages women.

Akshara has engaged with students for over 2 decades and have seen the results of gender awareness programs on their thinking and behaviour. They have been particularly effective with college going young people as they are in the learning phase of their lives before they embark on the journey to employment and marriage and/or other relationships. When we explore the concept of gender inequality with students, they recognise the skewed gender roles in our society, identify male privileges and discrimination of women. When biological sex is disassociated from the gender socialisation process within our families and in society, it becomes clear how women, girls and other genders are treated as second class people. Inequality results in the deprivation of rights, opportunities and resources which is unfair and harmful for society. The impact of workshops on gender equality is seen in two important areas of their lives – relationships within the household and at the workplace. The Training identifies issues in both these sites and shares how we can be more equitable, sensitive and co-operative.

In most families, women are assumed and trained to be homemakers whilst men are trained to be earners. Young men follow this tradition by expecting their mothers and sisters to be at home and be primarily responsible for household tasks. This creates an impact on their education, mobility and levels of confidence. Lack of skills usually leads to economic dependency and makes them vulnerable to different forms of violence. 'Protection' of girls and women in the name of safety leaves them unsure and scared of travel. Young men as brothers, husbands and sons can support their sisters, wives and mothers in sharing household tasks and in the allocation of resources like family wealth. Young women can be empowered to educate themselves, be brave, more confident and navigate the private and public space of home and the workplace.

Gender inequality trails women to the workplace. Many employers follow gender stereotypes and give them women oriented jobs like back-office jobs, care giving like nursing, or unskilled jobs at the bottom of the job hierarchy. Women are routinely sexually harassed by their male co-workers and bosses. There is silence around this harassment as women do not want to lose their jobs. Men can stop harassment as well as discourage their fellow workers from it. They can be allies and fight for equal wages and a fair distribution of work. Women, on their part, can seriously seek employment and persuade family members to share household tasks or they will have a double burden.

Gender equality will be achieved when people are able to access and enjoy equal rewards, resources and opportunities regardless of their gender. Akshara's Gender Curriculum and Training encourages young people to experientially understand power, privilege and possibilities that some people have and some people do not have in a given society and try to change their beliefs and behavior.



The Method

The Akshara Gender Curriculum and Training was designed to create an interactive space for students to discuss and learn gender concepts and change their beliefs and behaviours. This Pilot attempt covered the months from October 2022 for preparations of training modules and implementation through to January 2023.

Our Project Goals

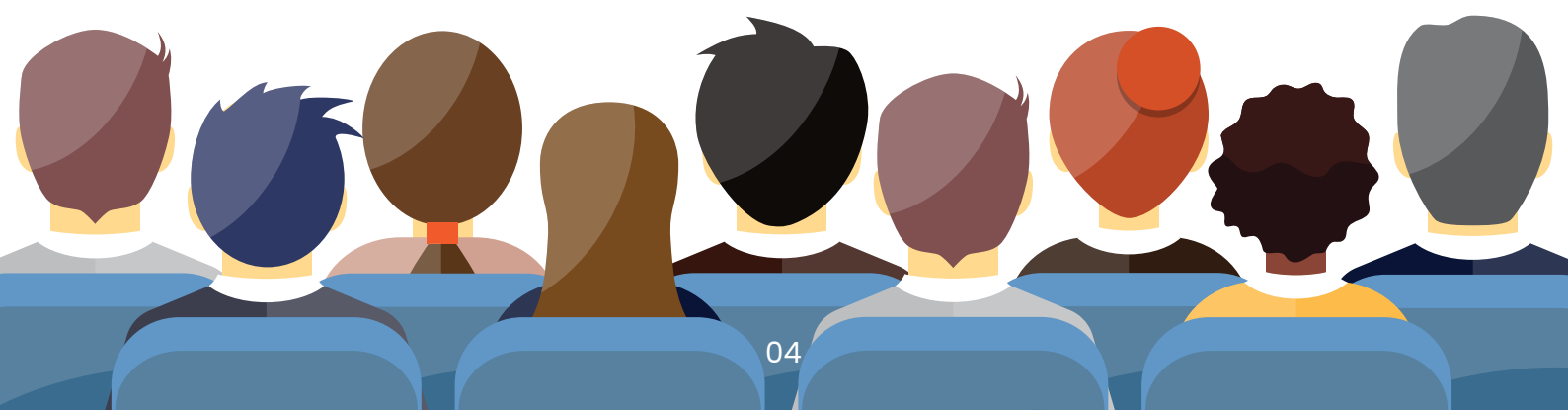
- to make women students capable of overcoming gender discrimination and find ways to prevent violence in their own lives.
- to make men students aware of gender inequality and realise male privileges.

Project Strategies

- Direct classroom intervention with about 50–80 male and female students within the age group of 15–18 years from one selected ITI Institute.
- Experienced master trainers conduct gender trainings using experiential learning pedagogy.
- Trainings to focus on issues of gender inequality, prevention of violence and supporting change.
- Use of feedback mechanisms to tracking students' understanding of the concept.

Profile of Students

The Akshara Gender Curriculum Training had 56 students from non-technical like cosmetology and technical ones like computer related courses. We had started out with only women students but the ITI Principal included men students as he thought the training would be beneficial for them. The mixed group consisted of 68% women and 32% men. The majority [79%] were orange ration card holders whose family income ranged from Rs 15000 to Rs 1 Lakh or were from a very modest economic background. Most, 82%, had a family of 3–4 members and they stayed in one or two rooms in tenement housing buildings. Most of them were Hindus [77%] and Buddhists 21% belonging to Open Caste 41%, Dalits 34% and OBC 16%.



In the inaugural session of the Pilot Project, the Principal and the Vice Principal of ITI addressed the students on the relevance of the training. Akshara representatives spoke about the organisation and its programs. The ITI and its Principal and teachers had selected a section of its students from the cosmetology and computer related courses. 56 students attended the training after their educational sessions were over.

After the introductory formalities, the participants were asked to fill in a Baseline form with their personal information and a few questions about Gender Equality.

Below is the Session Plan for the training which was spread over 2 months. The description of the session is followed by comments.

Session 1: Introductory Session: Ideal World

Content: This introductory session was designed to create a safe space for participants, for exchange of views and look at their concept of an Ideal World, and their support system or cheerleaders. Students used poster paper and pictures to explore their ideal world. Discussion focused on the difference in the perspectives of girls and boys in visualising an Ideal World. Both men and women had goals but the latter had more barriers in achieving their goals.

Comments: The participants were surprised to see the difference in perspectives between the boys and girls. It was an eye opener especially for the boys to realise the types of barriers women face in society.

Session 2: Gender Socialization

Content: This session explored the gender socialization process in families, schools and communities. This was done through exercises which allowed the participants to go into their past and recognise the early moments when they became aware of their own gender. The participants also identified the many ways in which this socialization process played out in schools and communities.

Comments: What surfaced in this session were a lot of biases and patterns which many of us harbour. Whilst these biases are a problem for both genders, the impact on women is phenomenal especially in the amount of workload that she has to deal with at home. This invariably impacted her study and her career prospects.

Session 3: Impact of Media on Gender Perspectives

Content: This session was meant to help participants become aware of the role of the mass media in the propagation of gender stereotypes. The process was to build a view of the media through a critical lens. We emphasised advertisements and movies.

Comments: The participants enjoyed the session as they had to create their own gender equal advertisements. This creative approach helped them discuss gender stereotypes in groups. Their creations also showed if they had grasped the concepts.

Session 4: Beauty and Body Image

Content: This session focused on the unrealistic definitions of beauty which society and media propagated. These beauty standards caused social anxiety, low confidence and other mental and physical issues especially amongst girls. It also discussed how these beauty standards did not guarantee happiness, success or love. Important areas of discrimination like colour of skin, weight, height, hair etc were explored. Emphasis was placed on health, grooming and personality rather than typical beauty standards.

Comment: This session brought up a lot of questions, led to introspection especially amongst the girls who admitted to a lack in self-confidence based on their body image. The participants expressed their concerns about getting jobs or getting partners if they did not fit beauty standards.

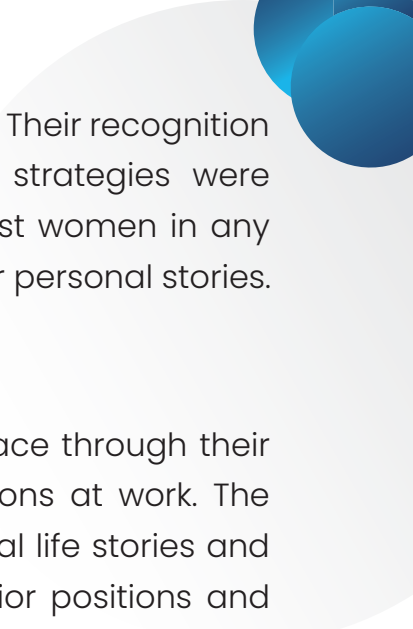
Session 5: Masculinity and Femininity

Content: In this session, awareness was created on the socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity. The stereotypical traits of an ideal man or ideal woman and the pressure to conform to them usually causes unhappiness and gender discrimination. The participants explored how to redefine these concepts with gender equality in mind.

Comments: Boys and girls were asked to create their ideal man and woman, and present it to each other, it was interesting to see the reactions to the same. Also, the difference in their understanding was quite stark and both learnt from each other and active discussions followed.

Session 6: Violence against Women

Content: The session explored the different types of violence against women and its causes. It also focused on strategies to address them including existing laws. Participants were asked to do role plays on issues like domestic violence in the household, sexual harassment and violence on the streets and in the workplace.



Comment: This session was very impactful especially for the boys. Their recognition of their own privilege and power shocked them. Bystander strategies were accepted and they agreed to stand up against violence against women in any form. This was a rather emotional session with girls narrating their personal stories.

Session 7: Gender Discrimination

Content: The session was on the discrimination which women face through their lives but the focus was on female infanticide and discriminations at work. The causes and impact of both the issues were explored through real life stories and statistics. Wage differences, sexual harassment, barriers to senior positions and pregnancy were some of the factors discussed to highlight workplace discrimination.

Comment: The session was well received by all the participants. Questions and sharing of experiences were an integral part. Women participants shared the different ways in which they had experienced discrimination. Boys saw these discriminations in the lives of their mothers and sisters.

Session 8: Goal Setting and Negotiation Skills

Content: This session allowed each participant to identify the difference between a dream and a goal and then set themselves a SMART goal. Strategies to achieving their goals were explored and the negotiating skills required to navigate the system were discussed.

Comments: Each participant identified their SMART Goals and was very excited to create their road map to reaching it. The GPS (Goal/Plan/Success) acronym was a extremely popular.

Session 9: Recap

Content: Participants were asked to form groups and do a short recap of the 8 sessions which they had to present to the class. This ended with all of them taking a pledge for 3 strategies that they would implement in their lives to create a gender equal world.

The Endline form was filled in by participants for evaluation purposes.

Comment: While the Facilitators ensured that all points were covered, the participants made creative presentations using formats like Quizzes, Games, PowerPoint presentation and interactive discussions.

This is a summary of played games at the ITI with around 150 students.

1. Samanta Ki Daud

Objective:

The objective of the obstacle race was to create an experience which shows the disparities between genders. By deliberately creating an uneven playing field, the aim was to provoke an understanding of how societal roles affect outcomes.

Game Description:

The obstacle race was meant for both girls and boys. However, the race track was divided to reflect gender-specific challenges. The track for boys included more obstacles, mimicking the tasks and restrictions typically faced by girls. Conversely, the track for girls involved tasks commonly associated with boys.

The deliberate imbalance ensured that boys faced more obstacles, leading to a loss of time. The tasks on the boys' track were designed to induce frustration and discomfort, prompting reactions like complaints or arguments. These reactions lead to a discussion about the perceived unfairness, facilitating a gradual realization among participants about the inherent privileges and limitations each gender faces.

Comments:

All students enjoyed the game but it was interesting to see how it impacted the boys when they realized the unfairness of the situation. Many of them commented that they had not realized that women faced so many obstacles in their lives.



2. One Minute Game

Objective:

The One Minute Game was to encourage participants to contemplate on the gender division of labour. By assigning traditional male tasks to female participants and vice versa, the aim was to challenge societal norms and foster discussions on breaking gender-based stereotypes.

Game Description:

The One Minute Game involved participants completing simple tasks within a minute, such as lighting a stove, rolling a roti, and threading a needle. The twist lay in the unusual combination and speed of these tasks, often resulting in laughter from onlookers as participant's rushed about and occasionally dropped items. This setup showcased the challenges and unfamiliarity of tasks beyond traditional gender roles. It showed that there need not be women oriented and men-oriented tasks and that both can be done by both genders if they so wanted to.

Comments:

This was a popular game and most students who attended the Mela wanted to take part in it. In the beginning they thought these tasks were simple and could be done by them easily but many of them struggled with them as they were not used to doing them.



3. Mitwa

Objective:

The game was meant to discuss the ideas, hopes, and fears that boys and girls had about relationships. The underlying message was that boys and girls can give directions to their lives and think about their prospective partners' expectations and hopes.

Game Description:

The game was called "Mitwa" or the Dating Game, and is an adaptation of the traditional Throw the Ring Game. A large cloth displaying the outline of a heart is laid out and various objects representing different stages and aspects of courtship between a man and a woman and marriage are placed within the heart. Participants are given three chances to select an object and toss a ring on them. Each chosen object became the topic for discussion amongst participants like romance, relationships and marriage.

Comments:

Since students from both genders were attending the Mela, there was a little discomfort in discussing relationships. But soon there were avid discussions and a realization that they had never thought about these topics. The game allowed for a building of rapport between boys and girls as they were able to hear each other's' views.



The data from the Base and Endline was feed into Excel sheets for a statistical analysis. By and large, barring 10% to 15%, students had gender equal views on basic gender norms and beliefs on issues like the custom of dowry, feminine beauty standards, menstruation taboos, and a husband's right to violence. It is heartening to note that this minority also changed their views after the training which was reflected in the Endline. We see a movement towards 0% which demonstrated that they had understood the gender concepts. Participants are usually conservative on masculinity issues like men showing emotions in public or not approving of women earning more than their male co-workers. Only 10% to 15% students agreed with such statements but it was encouraging to see that they too disapproved of them at the end of the project.

The largest shift towards gender equal statements was seen in students' understanding of women's reproductive rights. 67% agreed that men, as heads of the household should decide on the family size but the number whittled down to 17% in the Endline Feedback. Another statement which touched on the popular notion of women as homemaker who should do paid labour only in case of economic need also moved from 37% to 3%. Another popular notion was discarded by those [30% to 0%] who thought that domestic violence should be tolerated by women for the sake of family unity. There seems to be some confusion in understanding the statement on gender roles. We need to re-phrase the statement and explain it better. If we club all statements together, we find that 91% of women and 82% of men had a positive understanding of gender equality at the end of the training.

A gender-wise break-up showed that women who held conservative views rejected them in most statements. The exception was 47% to 29% shift in their understanding of husband's role in deciding the number of children in the family. Quite a few women students thought that men as earners and heads of the family should play a role in this decision even though it impinged on their reproductive rights. The men students, on the other hand, moved easily from their earlier positions to a more equality one through all the statements. Both men and women moved away from the neutral position of 'neither agree nor disagree' by the end of the sessions which we can mean that their ideas were clarified enough for them to take a stand.



The Way Forward

The pilot project was a success as we can see from the attendance levels of the participants. There was good involvement in the process with heated discussions and energetic role plays and poster making. There was no doubt that they had enjoyed the non-lecture method of delivery of the training. Secondly, the Baseline and Endline Feedback results showed that the majority of the students had understood and some had changed their view from a conservative to a more gender equal one.

There is a potential is using this curriculum for other ITI s with a bit of revision of the training modules and an appropriate time structure.



		Agree	
No.	Questions	Baseline	Endline
1	People who achieve success always come from a financially strong background.	10%	0%
2	Boys are better than girls in science and maths.	10%	3%
3	Women should have a joint account with their father/husband so that they can use the account properly.	37%	3%
4	Nature has assigned different roles to men and women.	70%	80%
5	The primary role of women is to take care of the family and home.	20%	0%
6	At dinner time the men of the family should be served before the women of the house.	10%	3%
7	It is okay to slap the wife for disobeying the husband.	7%	0%
8	A woman who wears short and tight clothes becomes a victim of molestation.	20%	0%
9	Women must endure violence to keep the family together.	30%	0%
10	As head of the family, the man should decide how many children his wife should have. / A man should decide the number of children for himself and his wife.	63%	17%
11	It is the duty of a brother to ask his sister to stay at home for the safety of his sister.	27%	0%
12	Men should take financial decisions for their family members as they are better at handling money.	27%	0%
13	Women/girls should not participate in kitchen work during menstruation.	13%	0%
14	For a woman to be called beautiful, she must be fair and slim.	3%	0%
15	The ornaments given to a girl by her parents and in-laws during marriage are owned by her husband.	17%	0%
16	It is okay to give and take dowry.	10%	0%
17	It is shameful for men to cry in public.	13%	0%
18	Girls who are ambitious about their career cannot make a good wife.	27%	0%
19	women should not earn more than men	10%	0%
20	Women should work only when there is an economic problem in the family.	37%	3%

Aha moments: Reflections by Students:

1. Nagesh was one of the students who attended the program. His Aha moment happened when he went home and asked his mother if there was something different, she had wanted to do in her life but had not been able to. He was surprised to know that she had been a good singer and wanted to pursue her singing but was not given the opportunity since the family believed that women should not sing in public places. He was shocked and upset at himself that he had never taken the time to ask his mother what she wanted in her life.
2. Shabnam had always hidden her dream of pursuing acting as a hobby since she felt her parents would not agree. But when she performed a role play in one of the sessions and the student audience appreciated for it, she decided that she would join a 'nukkad natak' group in her area. She plans to do street theatre on gender issues.
3. Rakesh had never really worked or interacted with a girl as a friend. He was very shy and reticent working with a mixed gender group on the Mela. Later he told the Facilitators that he had no idea that boys could be friends with girls. Now he no longer feels scared to interact with them.
4. Tiwari came from a family where his father would often come home drunk and beat up his mother. This was traumatic. But after the session on domestic violence, he realised that he could actually help stop the violence by threatening his father with police action. The information and discussions in the session empowered him to make a difference in his home.
5. Radhika skipped a lot of classes due to family pressures and often wondered if studying was worth it. But after hearing the discussions in the sessions, she approached her brother for support and decided to stand up to family pressure to complete her course.

(Names changed for privacy reasons)









AKSHARACENTRE is a registered not for profit, women's rights organisation founded in 1995 which believes in changing society by empowering women and girls.

- We work for young women's higher education and livelihood skills so they can be financially self reliant
- We work to eliminate gender discrimination and violence against women
- We engage with young men to encourage them to be gender advocates
- We campaign for a safe and inclusive city in which women can be secure and productive

We engage individually to change the hearts and minds of youth and towards a larger gender narrative change by undertaking education, trainings and public campaigns. We also collaborate with the government to improve their responsiveness to violence against women, to introduce and upgrade services and policies as well as bring gender inclusion in the planning processes. We work in Mumbai, and in cities and with organisations in Maharashtra and India. Internationally, we have been associated with UN Women, Committee for Status of Women, UN Habitat and with Department of Women and Child Development.

WEBSITES: www.aksharacentre.org | www.standupagainstviolence.org

SOCIAL MEDIA:  [aksharacentre](#)  [aksharacentreindia](#)  [aksharacentre](#)  [theaksharavideos](#)

