

What are Gender Roles?

-Gender roles in society means how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. For example, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing.

-Division of labour in set-ups like homes, workplace etc are also connected with gender roles. For eg. because men are expected to be macho and strong, most of our fathers go out for work to earn the bread, while mothers take care of us because women are traditionally seen to be nurturers.

GENDER SENSITIZATION TRAINING

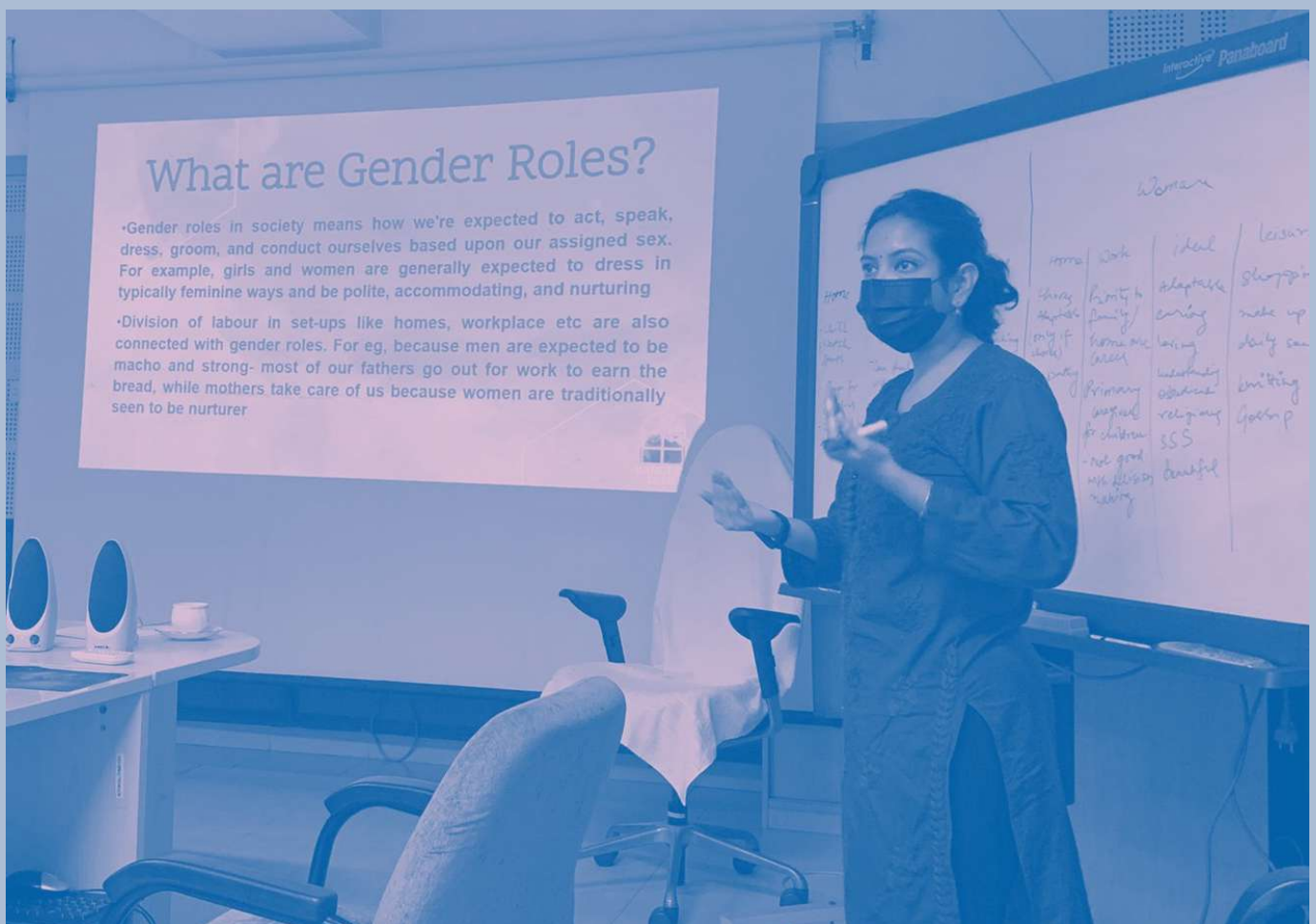
Regional Training Institute,
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5th July, 2022



**RANGEEN
KHIDKI**

INTRODUCTION



Rangeen Khidki Foundation conducted a Gender Sensitization Training in the Regional Training Institute at Salt Lake in Kolkata on **5th July, 2022**. The training was conducted in-person at the CGO (Central Government Office) Complex with **10 participants** who are railway auditors from different railway offices across India. There were **9 male and 1 female** participants hailing from diverse backgrounds.

The session began with a brief ice-breaking activity where the active participation from the participants immediately created a safe space for an unhindered progression of the session. As a stepping stone to understand the difference between gender and sex, participants were asked to categorise the some given phrases as gender, sex or not sure. Some participants knew that sex and gender is different but through the aim of the activity was to also bring up the confusion and then move forward to gain clarity. Most participants, despite categorising some phrases as “not sure”, stated logical reasons which reflected that subconsciously they are aware that certain expectations or roles are socially constructed. Phrases such as “Men are suited to be engineers”, “Women are shy” were categorised as “not sure” as the participants reasoned “women can also be engineers”, “women as per society should be shy but there are also women who are bold”. Therefore, the participants at some level were aware about the influence of society in shaping expectations and roles for men and women as they tried to unpack the differentiating concepts of gender and sex. After the activity ended, the facilitators thoroughly discussed the differences in the concept of gender and sex and encouraged the participants to denote sex as male, female, intersex while gender is denoted as man, woman, transgender* etc.

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To understand how gender is constructed and established during the process of growing up, participants were asked to share the first time they realised their gender. Each of the experiences dated to their childhood as for some it was a gradual process of performing gender appropriate behaviour while for others it was through a comment or advice they received from elder members. As stated by one male participant, “once I was upset so my uncle came in and said to cheer up and not to worry as I am a man and I am yet to face the real world outside”. Similarly, another respondent once heard their school teacher say “boys can be beaten by both boys and girls but girls cannot endure such beating but boys are more masculine so engage in fighting”.



As the session progressed to encourage the participants to introspect, a group activity on gender roles was administered to them. In this activity two groups representing men and women were required to note down activities that society perceives ideal for men and women in different levels like- at home, at workplace, the desired/ideal man or woman and leisure activities. A sharp distinction was reflected in the activities noted for both genders under the same levels by the two groups. For women, activities such as household chores (at home), prioritising family over career (at workplace), qualities like caring, obedient, religious and cultural (ideal woman) and lastly, shopping, fashion, gossiping as leisure activities were noted by the group. As opposed to this, the group representing men noted, chill and watch sports (at home), diligent, decisive (at workplace), protector, breadwinner (as ideal man) and drinking, watching action movies, no curfew, use foul language (leisure activities) for men. Two groups representing men and women were then given the opportunity to debate for and against the points that each group had noted for all four levels. Post this activity, participants were asked to share their reflections- “allowed our internal biases to come out”, “took us two steps back to reason and challenge the wrongs more strongly”. Hence, by fostering team spirit among the participants, it allowed them a scope to re-look and challenge the activities they have witnessed and the expected traits.



Next, the concept of patriarchy was introduced in the session. The participants were invited to explain what they generally understood by the term patriarchy. To which some participants responded patriarchy as “the idea of power belonging to a certain gender”, “male dominance”, “power that transfers from one man to other” (generational). The active participation enriched the training experience for both the participants and the facilitators. The participants expressed eagerness when the concept of feminism was introduced. Soon the discussions on feminism changed its course to arrive to the core beliefs of feminism- gender equality and gender equity. As the discussion deepened, one participant asked, “if one girl states that she practises purdah out of her own will then should I tell her that it is not on her own will but rather purdah is a patriarchal tool that oppresses women?”. The facilitators encouraged the participants to respectfully ask the concerned girl what is the significance of purdah to her to lead the way for a healthy conversation without hurting one’s sentiments. Engaging in meaningful conversations to understand the significance of a particular practice which may be foreign to the participant is always more ideal than assuming or concluding without factual knowledge. The facilitators also mentioned how having an accommodating mindset to acknowledge the multiple lived realities would encourage others to share their experiences freely which will eventually enrich the experiences of both the parties.

In order to identify how the multiple realities of each individual gets shaped by the intersecting forces of gender along with other social identities, the concept of Feminism followed by Intersectional Feminism was introduced shortly after. The activity which was administered to the participants provided a scope to identify the social aspects-caste, class, gender, along with biological aspects-abled, disabled and how these intersect to act as a privilege for some and an obstacle for others. Thus, through this activity the participants identified the social identities that were intersecting and how it determined the accessibility to certain resources for all individuals. Through a thorough discussion followed by diagrammatic representation the nuanced manner in which one's social identities and social position influences the access and utilisation of resources and opportunities were explained.

For a holistic approach to gender sensitization, understanding and recognizing violence especially gender based violence formed a crucial aspect of the training. The participants through an activity were expected to individually identify and scale (very peaceful to very violent) various forms of violence based on the instances that were shared with them. Participants were quick to identify the difference between violent and peaceful behaviour. Most participants rated physical and sexual violence like rape, murder, humiliation, slapping or hitting as very violent. Some participants also recognised violation of consent, emotional threats as violent. However, instances concerning familial relations, "father yelling at mother", "husband using wife's money without her permission" were scaled as neutral. After a brief introspection and discussion, some participants gave their suggestions by rescaling certain instances such as, "boyfriend uploading a girlfriend's picture without her consent" as very violent. Therefore, in their attempt to scale the various forms of violence, the participants gained an opportunity to analyse the instances based on their own conscience and perception

As a concluding note, a short film named “Juice” was streamed to allow the participants see and analyse the nuances of how gender socialisation coupled with gender based roles, concept of autonomy and leisure spans out in an Indian domestic setting. Post the film screening, the participants were invited to share their thoughts and reflections from the film. Some stated, “the female protagonist finally prioritises herself for once”, “women’s efforts or work is under appreciated”, “from childhood the upbringing of the girl child is such to serve others”. The participants shared that many scenes from the film seemed familiar as they have seen these gender roles play out in their lives and in their homes while growing up. Therefore, the film served as a quick recapitulation of the primary message and also provided a scope to the participants to use a critical lens to perceive how gender and power dynamics play out in intimate, domestic spheres.



RECOMENDATIONS

Since concepts and nuances of gender are not stagnant, periodic recapitulation in the form of monthly or quarterly sessions or workshops would assist the participants to be aware and vocal about gender injustice and further, implement the learnings in their practical lives. Inducting gender sensitization as a practice in the workplace would enable to maintain a healthy and safe working environment by nurturing a harmonious relation among the colleagues, improve the confidence levels of both the male and female employees and forge a sense of equality in the workplace. The active participation of the participants with great zeal to re-learn and unpack the debates on gender, feminism, intersectional feminism and gender based violence established a collaborative setting which enriched the training session.



REFLECTIONS

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The session had so much more to offer than what I expected it to be. Videos you showed were also very helpful.

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The purpose of this training is fulfilled as I really soaked in whatever was taught and came up during this session.

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I'm glad I got to attend this training session. Nice session.

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At Least we all got aware to say and talk about gender equality and other issues that exist.

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