

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Since Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India in May 2014, his government has implemented a series of transformative policies and reforms aimed at reshaping the country's economic, social, and political landscape. Modi's tenure has been marked by a focus on economic development, infrastructure improvement, and efforts to strengthen India's position on the global stage. One of the cornerstones of Modi's regime has been economic reform. His government introduced several key initiatives designed to stimulate growth and improve the business environment. The Goods and Services Tax (GST), rolled out in July 2017, was a landmark reform aimed at creating a unified indirect tax system, reducing tax evasion, and simplifying the tax structure. Another significant initiative is the Make in India campaign, launched in September 2014. This initiative seeks to boost manufacturing, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and enhance the country's global competitiveness. By creating a more investor-friendly environment, the Modi government aims to position India as a global manufacturing hub. Additionally, the Digital India program has been central to Modi's economic strategy. This initiative aims to enhance online infrastructure, promote digital literacy, and ensure that government services are accessible through digital platforms. The Jan Dhan Yojana, which focuses on financial inclusion, has opened millions of new bank accounts for the underbanked population, facilitating easier access to financial services. Infrastructure development has been a major focus of Modi's administration. The government has invested heavily in various infrastructure projects to improve connectivity and support economic growth. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban and Rural) aims to provide affordable housing to all by 2022, addressing the housing deficit and improving living standards. The Smart Cities Mission, launched in June 2015, aims to develop 100 smart cities across India. This project focuses on creating urban spaces that are sustainable, efficient, and technologically advanced. Improvements in urban infrastructure, including transportation and sanitation, are key components of this mission.

The Evolution of Peer Pressure

**BHAVNEET KOUR**  
Peer pressure, the influence exerted by a peer group to encourage an individual to change their attitudes, values, or behaviors, has been a significant social force throughout history. As society has evolved, so too has the nature and impact of peer pressure, adapting to new cultural norms, technological advancements, and social structures.

**Historical Context**  
In its earliest forms, peer pressure was closely tied to survival and communal living. Early human societies were structured around small, tight-knit communities where conformity to group norms was essential for survival. Individuals who deviated from these norms could be ostracized or even expelled, which in many cases could be life-threatening. Peer pressure in this context served as a mechanism to ensure that everyone contributed to the group's well-being, adhered to social norms, and participated in communal activities.

During the medieval and early modern periods, peer pressure remained a significant force, often reinforced by rigid societal structures, such as class systems and religious hierarchies. Social norms were dictated by the ruling classes and religious authorities, and deviation from these norms could result in severe consequences, ranging from social ostracization to legal penalties.

**The Industrial Revolution and Urbanization**  
The Industrial Revolution marked a significant turning point in the nature of peer pressure. As people moved from rural areas to cities, they encountered more diverse peer groups. The anonymity of urban life allowed for more individual expression, but it also created new forms of peer pressure. The rise of the middle class and the importance of social status meant that people were often pressured to conform to the norms of their new social circles.

In this period, the concept of "keeping up with the Joneses" became prevalent. Social status was increasingly measured by material possessions, and individuals felt pressure to conform to the consumer habits of their peers. This type of peer pressure was less about survival and more about social mobility and acceptance within a rapidly changing society.

**The 20th Century: Peer Pressure in the Age of Mass Media**  
The 20th century brought about significant changes in how peer pressure was experienced, particularly with the rise of mass media. Radio, television, and print media became powerful tools for shaping public opinion and societal norms. Advertisers and media outlets often created idealized images of how people should look, behave, and live. This, in turn, created new forms of peer pressure, as individuals felt compelled to conform to these manufactured ideals.

The post-World War II era saw the rise of the teenager as a distinct social group. With more disposable income and influence, teenagers became a target for advertisers, who promoted specific lifestyles, fashion trends, and behaviors. Peer pressure among adolescents became more intense, as social acceptance often hinged on conforming to these media-driven norms.

**The Digital Age: Peer Pressure in the Age of Social Media**  
The advent of the internet and social media has fundamentally transformed the nature of peer pressure. Today, peer pressure is no longer confined to face-to-face interactions or even to a specific geographic location. Social media platforms allow for constant, real-time communication and comparison with peers, often on a global scale.

One of the most significant changes brought about by social media is the shift from peer pressure as a primarily local phenomenon to one that is global. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok create environments where individuals are constantly exposed to the lives, opinions, and behaviors of others. The curated nature of social media content often leads to unrealistic comparisons, fostering a sense of inadequacy and a pressure to conform to unattainable standards.

Moreover, the anonymity and reach of social media can amplify negative forms of peer pressure, such as cyberbullying. The pressure to conform online can be relentless, with likes, shares, and comments serving as immediate feedback on one's social standing.

**The Future of Peer Pressure**  
As technology continues to evolve, so will the nature of peer pressure. The rise of virtual and augmented reality, for example, may create new forms of social influence, where individuals feel pressure to conform not just in the real world, but in virtual spaces as well. Additionally, the increasing integration of artificial intelligence in social media algorithms could further shape peer pressure dynamics by curating content that reinforces certain behaviors and norms.

However, there is also a growing awareness of the negative effects of peer pressure, particularly in the context of mental health. Movements advocating for authenticity, self-expression, and mental well-being are challenging traditional forms of peer pressure, encouraging individuals to resist conforming to harmful societal norms.

**Conclusion**  
The evolution of peer pressure reflects broader changes in society, from the communal survival mechanisms of early human history to the complex social dynamics of the digital age. While peer pressure has always been a powerful social force, its impact today is more pervasive and far-reaching than ever before. As society continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which individuals experience and respond to peer pressure, making it an enduring aspect of the human experience.

**(The writer is Biotechnologist, Microbiologist, Public speaking expert)**

Building the Future: How Schools Can Cultivate Emotional Intelligence in Students

**SHUCHI MAHAJAN GUPTA**

As the Principal of Air Force School Jammu, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible potential that our students possess. They are inquisitive, driven, and full of promise. However, as educators, our role extends beyond imparting knowledge; it includes nurturing the whole child. In today's rapidly evolving world, it is essential to emphasize not only academic prowess but also the cultivation of emotional intelligence (EQ). This article explores the crucial role that schools play in fostering EQ, the impact it has on students' lives, and practical strategies to integrate it into the educational experience.

**Understanding Emotional Intelligence**  
Emotional intelligence, often abbreviated as EQ, encompasses a set of skills that enable individuals to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions while also being able to recognize, understand, and influence the emotions of others. Psychologist Daniel Goleman, who popularized the concept, identified five key components of EQ: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

> Self-Awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. It lays the foundation for personal growth and effective communication.

> Self-Regulation involves managing one's emotions, particularly in stressful or challenging situations, to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

> Motivation refers to the internal drive to achieve goals, not merely for external rewards but out of passion and commitment.

> Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, which is crucial for building meaningful relationships and fostering a sense of community.

> Social Skills encompass a range of abilities that facilitate positive interactions, including communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork.

While IQ might measure cognitive abilities, EQ gauges the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that are critical for success in both personal and professional domains. In fact, studies have shown that individuals with high EQ are more likely to excel in leadership roles, maintain healthy relationships, and experience overall life satisfaction.

**The Importance of EQ in Today's World**  
The importance of emotional intelligence in today's world cannot be overstated. As our society becomes more interconnected, the ability to navigate complex social dynamics, work collaboratively with diverse teams, and manage stress in a fast-paced environment is paramount. Moreover, with the rise of artificial intelligence and automation, many technical skills are becoming increasingly commoditized. What remains uniquely human is our capacity to connect, empathize, and lead with emotional intelligence.

For students, developing EQ is essential not just for academic success but for their overall well-being. It helps them manage the



pressures of school, form healthy relationships with peers and teachers, and build resilience in the face of challenges. By fostering EQ, we are equipping our students with the tools they need to thrive in all areas of life.

**The School's Role in Cultivating EQ**

Schools have traditionally focused on the cognitive aspects of education, emphasizing subjects like mathematics, science, and language arts. While these subjects are undoubtedly important, they represent only one aspect of a child's development. As educators, we must also prioritize the emotional and social development of our students.

At Air Force School Jammu, we have recognized this need and taken proactive steps to integrate emotional intelligence into our curriculum and daily activities. This holistic approach to education acknowledges that a student's emotional and social well-being is intrinsically linked to their academic success. Creating a Supportive School Culture

The foundation of EQ development in schools lies in creating a supportive and inclusive culture. This begins with the school leadership and extends to every staff member, from teachers to support staff. At Air Force School Jammu, we prioritize fostering a positive school climate where every student feels valued, respected, and supported. This involves:

> Promoting a Growth Mindset: Encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as insurmountable obstacles helps them develop resilience and a positive attitude towards learning.

> Encouraging Open Communication: Creating an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions is crucial. Regular class meetings, open-door policies, and anonymous suggestion boxes are some ways we ensure that every student's voice is heard.

> Celebrating Diversity: Embracing and celebrating the diversity of our student body helps build empathy and understanding. By recognizing and respecting different perspectives, we cultivate an inclusive environment where all students feel a sense of belonging.

**Integrating EQ into the Curriculum**  
To effectively cultivate emotional intelligence, it must be integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as an add-on. At Air Force School Jammu, we have developed a

comprehensive approach that includes:

> Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs: SEL programs are designed to teach students the skills they need to manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. These programs are woven into our daily lessons and activities, ensuring that EQ development is a continuous process.

> Collaborative Learning Opportunities: Group projects, peer tutoring, and team-based activities encourage students to work together, share ideas, and develop social skills. These experiences not only enhance academic learning but also build teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution skills.

> Mindfulness and Reflection Practices: Incorporating mindfulness exercises, such as meditation, deep breathing, and journaling, into the school day helps students develop self-awareness and self-regulation. Reflection activities, where students review their experiences and emotions, also foster greater self-understanding and personal growth.

**Empowering Teachers and Staff**  
Teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating emotional intelligence in students. At Air Force School Jammu, we provide ongoing professional development for our teachers and staff to equip them with the tools and strategies needed to support students' emotional growth. This includes training in:

> Recognizing and Responding to Emotional Needs: Teachers are trained to recognize signs of emotional distress in students and to respond with empathy and appropriate support. They are also encouraged to model emotional intelligence in their interactions with students and colleagues.

> Creating Emotionally Safe Classrooms: An emotionally safe classroom is one where students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and expressing their emotions. Teachers are provided with strategies to create such environments, including the use of positive reinforcement, clear communication, and conflict resolution techniques.

> Implementing Restorative Practices: Instead of punitive measures, restorative practices focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships. By involving students in the process of resolving conflicts, we teach them valuable lessons in empathy, accountability, and forgiveness.

Involving Parents and the Community  
Emotional intelligence development extends beyond the school walls. At Air Force School Jammu, we actively involve parents and the wider community in our efforts to foster EQ. We offer workshops and resources for parents to support their children's emotional growth at home and encourage community partnerships that provide additional opportunities for students to develop their social and emotional skills.

**Measuring the Impact of EQ Programs**  
To ensure the effectiveness of our EQ initiatives, we regularly assess the impact of our programs. This includes:

> Student Surveys and Feedback: Gathering feedback from students helps us understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement. We use surveys, focus groups, and informal check-ins to gauge students' emotional well-being and the effectiveness of our EQ programs.

> Behavioral Indicators: We monitor key behavioral indicators, such as attendance, discipline referrals, and peer relationships, to assess the impact of our EQ initiatives. Positive changes in these areas often reflect improvements in students' emotional intelligence.

> Academic Performance: While EQ is not directly measured by academic grades, there is a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and academic success. By tracking students' academic progress, we can assess the indirect impact of our EQ programs on their overall achievement.

**Preparing Students for the Future**

In today's world, where change is constant and challenges are inevitable, emotional intelligence is more important than ever. As our students prepare to enter the workforce, they will need more than just technical knowledge; they will need the ability to collaborate, communicate, and lead with empathy. By fostering EQ, we are not just preparing students for academic success; we are preparing them for life.

At Air Force School Jammu, we are committed to developing well-rounded individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally intelligent. We believe that this holistic approach to education is the key to building a brighter, more compassionate future. **Conclusion** As educators, we have the power to shape the future by cultivating the minds and hearts of our students. By prioritizing emotional intelligence, we are not only enhancing their academic success but also equipping them with the skills they need to navigate the complexities of the modern world. At Air Force School Jammu, we are proud to be at the forefront of this movement, and we invite other schools to join us in building a future where emotional intelligence is recognized as an essential part of education. Together, we can create a world where our students not only excel in their studies but also thrive as compassionate, resilient, and emotionally intelligent individuals.

**(The writer is Principal Air Force school Jammu)**

The Shakti Paradox: Unleashing the Power of Women in India

**DR. ANKUSH MAHAJAN**

India, a land that has long prided itself on its spiritual heritage, where every nook and corner is adorned with temples dedicated to goddesses, today stands as a paradox. On one hand, women are revered as incarnations of the divine, worshipped as Devi in myriad forms-Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Kali-yet on the other, they are subjected to unimaginable brutality, cruelty, and discrimination. The recent horrific rape case in West Bengal once again forces us to confront the harsh reality of the plight of women in a society that claims to venerate them.

**The Reverence of Women in Indian Scriptures**  
From time immemorial, Indian culture has placed women on a pedestal, equating them with divinity. The Rigveda (10.85.46) proclaims:

"Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata,"  
"Where women are honored, divinity blossoms there."

This verse encapsulates the essence of how integral the respect for women is to the spiritual and moral fabric of society. Women, in ancient scriptures, are not merely revered; they are seen as the very embodiment of the cosmos, the primal energy, or Shakti that sustains the universe.

The Manusmriti (3.56) further underscores this reverence: "Yatra itaastu na pujiyante sarvaastatrafalaah kriyaah," "Where they are not honored, all actions remain unfruitful." Such verses clearly indicate the high esteem in which women were held in ancient Indian society. They were seen as essential to the prosperity, happiness, and overall success of any endeavor.

Devi Mahatmya, a text from the Markandeya Purana, celebrates the power and glory of the goddess Durga, who vanquishes the forces of evil and restores balance to the world. The Durga Saptashati (11.7) praises her:

"Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu Shakti Rupena Samsthitah,  
Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namastasyai Namah,"  
"Salutations to the Goddess who resides in all beings in the form of power."

Here, the Devi is recognized as the supreme force, existing within every woman, highlighting the inherent power and divinity present in the female gender.

In the Atharva Veda (14.1.6), the sanctity of the relationship between a husband and wife is depicted:

"Yatrema Yasya Varuna Bhava, Piturjayeva Savituriva Bhava,"  
"Be a queen to your father-in-law, a queen to your mother-in-law,

A queen to your brother-in-law, a queen to your husband."  
This verse not only highlights the reverence for women within the family structure but also underscores the role of women as the central figures in sustaining familial and social harmony.

In Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev Ji also emphasized the importance of women in his teachings. He questioned the patriarchal mindset that devalues women with his profound words:

"So Kyun Manda Aakhiye Jit Jame Rajan,"  
"Why call her inferior, who gives birth to kings!"

Guru Nanak's words resonate deeply in a society where

women are often relegated to secondary status, reminding us that women are the very source of life and deserve the utmost respect and reverence.

**The Contradictions of Modern Reality**

Despite such exalted positions in scriptures, the condition of women in modern India presents a grim reality. The recent case in West Bengal, where a woman was brutally raped and murdered, is not an isolated incident but a recurring horror that haunts our nation. Each such case starkly contrasts with the reverence expressed in our sacred texts, begging the question: How have we strayed so far from the ideals our ancestors held dear?

Women, who were once revered as the personification of Shakti, now face discrimination, violence, and oppression at every stage of life. From female infanticide to dowry deaths, from domestic violence to workplace harassment, the spectrum of abuse is as wide as it is terrifying. The paradox of being worshipped as goddesses while simultaneously being treated as lesser beings exposes a deep-seated hypocrisy within our society.

**Verses Calling for Justice and Equality**  
Indian scriptures are not silent on the issue of justice and the importance of righteous conduct. The Mahabharata (Shanti Parva, Chapter 78, Verse 17) asserts:

"Na Jatu Kamam Na Bhayam Na Lobham Dharma Moogat Sah,"  
"One should never act unrighteously through lust, fear, or greed."

This verse calls for adherence to dharma (righteousness) even in the face of personal desires or societal pressures, emphasizing that justice and morality should guide all actions, particularly those affecting the vulnerable and the weak.

The Ramayana too offers insights into the sanctity of womanhood through the character of Sita, who, despite being subjected to trials and tribulations, stands as a symbol of purity, strength, and dignity. Lord Rama's lamentation after Sita's abduction (Aranya Kanda, Sarga 61, Shloka 6) poignantly reflects the sorrow and anguish felt at the mistreatment of women:

"Na Jatu Lokat Sumahat Priyo Me Jivitatadapi,"  
"There is nothing in this world more precious than a woman's life."

This shloka underscores the value of women's lives, a sentiment that should guide our contemporary societal norms and laws.

The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 9, Verse 32) also speaks of the spiritual equality of all beings, including women:

"Striyau Vaishyas 'Batha Shudras Te'pi Yanti Param Gatim,"  
"Women, Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (laborers) can all attain the highest spiritual goal."

This verse emphasizes that spiritual salvation and the highest goals of life are accessible to all, regardless of gender, and underscores the inherent dignity and worth of every individual.

**The Need for a Paradigm Shift**  
The reverence for women, as expressed in our scriptures,

must transcend ritualistic worship and manifest in everyday behavior, attitudes, and practices. A perfect illustration of this respect is seen in the sacred bond of Rakhi, where a sister ties a thread around her brother's wrist, symbolizing love, protection, and the brother's vow to safeguard his sister. This tradition, rooted in deep affection and respect, echoes the timeless relationship between Lord Krishna and Draupadi. When Draupadi tied a simple strip of cloth around Krishna's wrist, he vowed to protect her, a promise he fulfilled during her greatest moment of distress.

This bond between Krishna and Draupadi is a reminder that the true worship of women lies not in ritualistic acts but in genuine care, protection, and respect for their dignity and well-being.

It is time we asked ourselves some uncomfortable questions: Why do we, as a society, continue to worship the female form while allowing rampant gender-based violence and discrimination to persist?

What is the value of our rituals and prayers if they do not translate into respect, safety, and equality for women in real life?

How can we claim to follow the path of dharma when we fail to protect the dignity and honor of women, who are the very embodiments of Shakti?

Our scriptures, rich with wisdom and guidance, provide a blueprint for a society where women are not only respected but are also empowered and valued as equal partners in the journey of life. Yet, these teachings remain unfulfilled promises in the lives of countless women who continue to suffer in silence.

**A Call to Action**

It is high time for a collective awakening, a revival of the spirit of the Vedic era where women were revered not just in words but in action. Laws must be strengthened, and justice must be swift and uncompromising. However, the change we seek must begin within us, in our homes, our schools, and our communities.

We must teach our sons and daughters the true meaning of respect, not just through words but by example. We must challenge and change the patriarchal mindsets that perpetuate the cycle of violence and oppression. And most importantly, we must recognize that until every woman in India can walk without fear and live with dignity, the worship of Devi in our temples will remain hollow.

As we reflect on the verses from our scriptures and the reality around us, let us not just raise our voices in condemnation but also in commitment to building a society where women are honored not just in rituals but in every aspect of life. Let the divine within each woman be recognized, respected, and revered, so that our prayers to Devi are truly fulfilled.

In the end, the question we must all answer is not whether we worship the goddess, but whether we honor her in the women we see every day. Are we ready to bridge the gap between the divinity we revere and the humanity we neglect? The answer to that question will determine the future of women in India and, ultimately, the soul of our nation.

**(The writer is Poet, Writer and Researcher)**