

Study Material

Course 1.4.6. Gender, School, and Society

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Unit 1 Gender Issues: Key Concepts

Sex: A set of biological and physiological characteristics of human beings such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones.

Gender: Those characteristics of human beings that are socially constructed.

- Central Principle for organizing societies
- Affects social, economic, political life
- Varies from society to society and can change over time
- Multidimensional in nature.

-Rather recent origin. American psychologists and sociologists started using the term "gender" in the 1950s. Sexologist John William Money was the first to coin the term 'gender role' in 1955. Thus, the term 'gender' is derived from his expression of 'gender role', which means girl or woman, boy or man, perform different actions and response differently depending on their social status, that includes but not restricted to their sexuality.

As Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1972), famous French philosopher, pointed out that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" through various socio-psychological processes that 'construct' one as fundamentally female (or male). She further elaborated by saying "social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature". Gender, therefore, is a socially constructed concept which includes the various roles, positions, traits, characteristics and other attributes, that are associated with behaviour and practices. These behaviours and practices as well as roles are most often differently associated with men and women and hence form the overall notion of gender. In other words, gender is an acquired identity, corresponds to man, woman or other genders which is dynamic in nature, and learned as a series of behaviour, practices, and roles through societal symbols, institutions, and agencies. It is an evolving process that defines the journey of an infant into a grown-up man or a woman, and varies over time in different societies, cultures, and contexts.

Difference between Sex and Gender

Sex	Gender
Sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals.	Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.
It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy.	It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society.
Sex is usually categorized as female or male.	Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time.
It is constant and universal. Does not change with change in time and society.	It is not universal and variable. Can change with time and different culture.

Social Construction of Gender

A social construct is something that doesn't exist in the "natural" world, but is instead a creation of society. Social constructions are the result of cultural practices and societal rules, which also influence the norms, practices, and guidelines that control how we use, perceive, and comprehend them.

Gender is a social construct which is constantly guarded and watched by each society. Gender has evolved from socially prescribed norms. Unbelievably, society assigns a gender (masculine or feminine) for everything and anything, whether it is a role, toy, colour, cloth, lifestyle, habit, thinking, doing, traditional practice, cultural taboo, ... and the list can be endless. The fact that gender is variable and is not a constant, can change with time and culture is a proof that gender is socially constructed instead of it being something "natural" arising out of biology. Gender is assigned at birth according to physical sex. Ann Oakley uses the term 'gender socialisation' in 1970s to describe the characteristics of men and women which are socially determined and learned through socio cultural interactions, in contrast to those which were considered to be biologically determined. There are specific socio-cultural processes and political structures related to each gender that shape the identity as well as role expectations from everyone. Thus, it can be said that the gender identity is an acquired identity based on one's socio-cultural and political contexts.

Society classifies sex and gender into two opposites or binaries - masculine for men and feminine for women. However, many people identify as genders other than male and female, which are referred to as non-binary, despite the fact that many believe that the gender binary accurately describes gender.

Society dictates the ways in which a boy and a girl should be brought up in the light of adult gender roles. Mother or primary caretaker responds differently to the boy child and girl child. The differential attitude includes touching, caring, and ideas about autonomy of boys and absence of autonomy of girls. The more parents display differential behaviour like exposing children to specific types of toys, more the child will express gender stereotypes. Parents are seen as channels

through which gender stereotypes are communicated to the children and later the children internalize the multiple stereotypes.

Judith Butler argues that we are neither born with gender nor do we have gender. Rather, according to Butler, we perform gender that is deeply embedded in our belief system, institutions and actions such as the language we speak, the way we walk, talk, eat etc. This is why, according to West and Zimmerman, gender seems to be normal and natural. Societal expectations, starting from a child's birth and continuing through life, shape the self-concept, aspirations and the idea of what it means to be a man and a woman. The concept of punishment and reward plays a motivating factor in meeting the expectations of society.

Transgender

Cisgender: Person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth.

Transgender: Persons whose gender identity and gender expression do not conform to that typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. It is an umbrella term including transsexual people, and third gender. In India, The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 has included trans-man, trans-woman, intersex people, genderqueer, and persons known as kinner, hijra etc. as transgender persons.

It is very recently that transgender, transsexualism, transvestism, intersex, and other such terms have been considered to be serious matters for conducting sociological studies. Previously, those topics were considered to be the matter of concern of medicine and psychology. Since the mid-1980s, the term 'transgender' has been used.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy means the rule by the male head of social units like family or tribe. Feminists see patriarchy as a present day unjust social system that subordinates, discriminates or is oppressive to women. Sylvia Walby defines Patriarchy as a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. In simple words, patriarchy means the societal mechanisms (including cultural beliefs, established norms, institutional practices etc) that allow, maintain and reiterate the domination of women, and even younger men, by older or more powerful men. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women.

Focusing on actual and perceived biological disparities between the two recognized sexes, men use women's supposed biological inferiority as justification for male dominance. Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations which are hierarchical and unequal. In patriarchy, the subjugation and oppression of women by men happen in different ways— by appropriating their productive and reproductive force, by controlling their bodies, minds, sexuality through law and religion. Stereotypes about femininity and masculinity are imposed on Patriarchal society, strengthening the power dynamics between men and women. Feminist approach tries to bring into the light the patriarchal control, oppression and exploitation of women's labour, fertility and sexuality inside the house and outside, at workplace and greater society.

Sylvia Walby, in her book 'Theorizing Patriarchy' (1990), identified six different structures in which patriarchy functions:

1. Paid employment i.e. poor job opportunities for women, less payment compared to men.
2. Household production i.e. men benefitting from individual woman's unpaid household work and childcare activities.
3. Culture consistently distinguished between men and women and expected different behaviours from them.
4. Sexuality i.e. male dominance by controlling women's sexuality
5. Violence i.e. male violence against women (harassment, abuse, rape, wife beating etc) as a means of control.
6. The state's legitimate coercion through which patriarchy is perpetuated.

She argues that patriarchy works in a two-fold fashion, ranging from a strong private patriarchy within the family, and then moving onwards to a kind of public patriarchy, in the backdrop of exploitative capitalist class relations, market and the state. While private patriarchy subjugates women within the family, public patriarchy does not directly forbid women to enter the 'public' sphere, but control them within that space. Analysing the contemporary British society, she argues that women might no longer be shackled by patriarchal relations within the private spaces of the household, but now they are left in the public sphere to be exploited to an even greater extent.

According to Kate Millet, a proponent of Radical Feminism, patriarchy operates through ideology (for example, myth and religion), institutions (for example, family, education, economy) and force (for example, wife beating and rape). Kumkum Sangari argues, on the other hand, that patriarchy functions in manifold ways in the Indian context. She coins the term 'multiple patriarchies' to identify the functioning of patriarchy through a plurality of religions, laws and customs. She argues that, there cannot be seen only a single patriarchal arrangement, but an overlap and intersection of multiple patriarchal arrangements, based on class, caste, religion, region and other such dynamics which lead to the hierarchical and repressive relations between women and men.

As V. Geetha argues, one needs to understand that gender and patriarchy are not isolated categories in themselves, but have interlinkages with caste, class and religion. The 'honour' of men and their communities (be it caste-based or religious) is assumed to be engraved on the women's bodies. Therefore, guarding the women's virtue and 'chastity' are seen as equal to safeguarding the male honour and, thereby, preserving their caste and religious identities. Thus, a woman's sexuality gets controlled by the nexus of patriarchy, caste, class and religion. Especially in the case of caste or religion-based riots, the assertion of community identity, exertion of power, or repression and opposition – all fervently revolve around the bodies of its women.

Empowerment

The one thing common in women, irrespective of culture and time, is that they are restricted by the customs, norms, beliefs, and values through which the society treat men and women differentially. It is manifested though inequality of wages between men and women, restriction on women's mobility etc.

In the root of the concept of empowerment is power. Power is the ability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will. Power in relation to social

economic and political aspects indicates control over resources and decision-making. The exercise of power by one over the other leads to determine the perception, preferences, and choices of a group. The controlled group has internalized it as natural and unchangeable. This has happened in gender relations where women have 'internalised patriarchy'. When the control is internalized then it is necessary to create power in oneself.

According to E. Whitmore there are some underlying assumptions of empowerment—

- Individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else and therefore should have the power both to define and act upon them.
- All people possess strengths upon which they can build.
- Empowerment is a lifelong endeavor.
- Personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping effectively.

Jo Rowland has identified four different forms of power;

(a) Power- control or influence over others, instrumentation of domination,

(b) Power- generative or productive power, which creates new possibilities and actions without domination,

(c) Power with- a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackle problems together, and

(d) Power from within- the mental strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is in self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

Empowerment is a term generally used to describe a process by which powerless people become conscious of their own situation and organize collectively to gain greater access to public service or to the benefits of economic growth.

The components of empowerment are—

- Women and men's sense of internal strength and confidence to face life.
- The right to make choices.
- The power to control their lives within and outside the home.
- The ability to influence the direction of social change towards the creation of a more just social and economic order.

According to Hapke Holly M. "access to and control over productive resources, knowledge and awareness of one's self and society's personal needs, health issues, legal rights, technological innovations and the availability of social and economic resources and how to take advantage of them, self-image, i.e., realization of one's capabilities and the potential and confidence to take action in one's life are the components of empowerment."

The four aspects of empowerment are —

1. Assets (power to): This concept refers to greater economic power in terms of material assets such as income, land, tools or technology. This being said, such economic power is not restricted to the possession of resources and wealth, but also includes better health, more

time, access to certain services such as loans, information and training, health centres and markets etc.

2. Knowledge and Know-how (power to): This means having more practical and intellectual knowledge or skills, enabling a person or a community to make the most of the opportunities that arise. It refers to management of people (leadership), techniques or procedures, training (literacy) as well as the development of thought and reason as critical analysis skills. Know-how highlights the importance of applying knowledge or the ability to translate one's knowledge into action or resources.
3. Will (internal power): This refers to power within, psychological strength or mental power: one's values and fears, self-confidence and self-perception. It is the ability and will to make one's own choices for the future, the awareness of one's own life plans as well as the challenges facing one's community. The concept of "will" also includes the two elements of state of mind (being) and the ability to use it towards others (knowing how to be).
4. Capacity (internal power and power with): This means having the opportunity to make decisions, take on responsibility, be free to act as one pleases and use one's resources (assets, knowledge, will). Decision-making encompasses several aspects: · The ability to make one's own decisions; the ability to take part in decision-making; the ability to influence decision-making and control those who make decisions on one's behalf; · The ability to make decisions for others, and to show authority (in situations where someone has to make the final decision).

Gender Bias

Gender bias is more or less prevalent in all types of societies across the world cultures. Gender bias means preferential treatment or prejudices toward one gender over the other. Bias may be a conscious or unconscious manifestation, implicit or explicit attitude or expression. Gender bias is subjective and preferential favour towards men than women due to women's inferior socio-cultural-economic-political positions in the society.

Gender bias is based on the biological needs of men and women to culturally assigned gender differences to socially prescriptive gender based- roles and stereotypes. Gender bias leads to discrimination and inequality between men and women. In other words, identities (roles or expectations), stereotypes (ideals or labelling) and biases (preferences or discrimination) are the main causes of gender inequality.

Although the Constitution of India has granted women 'equal rights', but gender inequalities and stereotypes remain deeply seated at home, at workplace, and in society. Due to traditional social bias towards women and for continuity of their neglected and disempowered position in society; there are limited opportunities for women to access to resources and services such as education, health care, jobs, membership, ownership, political and legal status, etc. Women are disadvantaged in their entire life-cycle – from birth to death. Son preference leads to foremost gender bias by killing female foetus in the womb (foeticide) and infanticide outside the womb. Gender bias regards girl child as 'burden' and boy child as 'boon'. Girl children are raised as surviving at the edge, with least needs and benefits. The gender socialisation process grows them as the 'sacrificor' – living life for others. Gender biased culture puts social sanction on them to give priority to family care over their own socio-psychological development and empowerment. Gender bias pushes their health and education as secondary needs. Mal- or under-nutrition and drop-out rates are highest

among girls than boys and women than men. When a girl matures to a woman, she carries the same family burden with more intensity and less individuality. Therefore, Indian society is biased to add primary responsibility for child and elderly care on women. Women are often fatigued due to hard work in family and field. Society is biased of their capabilities and underestimated their contributions in family, economy and society. Domestic and sexual abuses are accepted as part of women's life and an intrinsic part of being the 'weaker sex' in society. Poverty and exploitation are the major challenges faced by all women in some point of their lives. Devaluation of their intellectual capacity is the main cause for their insignificant representation in politics. Such biases thus deter and stop Indian women to aim and achieve higher social status and standard of living.

Gender Stereotype

Gender socialisation leads to gender stereotypes. Gendered personalities are manifested into common gender stereotypical behaviours. Therefore, gender stereotypes include generalisations and oversimplifications, ideals and labelling of gender based differences, characteristics, roles, relations, attitudes, and attributes of individuals and/or groups in relation to a particular society. Overt (and may not be precise) form of gender socialisation process through gender stereotypical clothes and colours, toys and games, role-taking and role-playing; intentionally or un-intentionally tend to reinforce socially 'appropriate' behaviours in children (Kimmel, 2000); which in turn form an important gender identity in adulthood.

Gender stereotypes are apparently considered as negative, but it may be positive as well. But most of the times, gender stereotypes do not communicate truth or correct information regarding gender characteristics in the society. However, gender stereotypes strongly influence the common people's assumptions, views and judgments related to gender and society. In return, it creates a vicious cycle of negative evidences, feelings, miscommunications and contradictions – thereby perpetuating and reinforcing gender stereotypes in society. Dangers of gender stereotyping can be realised by members of the society, but still simplistic generalisations are made or commented with disregard to its negative impact on people and society, especially women, who form the 'minority group' and hold a lower social strata with respect to men in the society. Research and scientific evidence demonstrates that children learn gender stereotypes from watching adults in the family, in school, in play area, in public place. Therefore, gender stereotypes are passed by the 'agents' of gender socialisation who are the parents, teachers, peers, relatives, neighbours, community/religious/political leaders, and importantly media.

According to social learning theorists Renzetti and Curran (1992), children are not only influenced by parents and peers, but they are also keen observants of the world around them, which makes countering gender socialisation and gender stereotypes difficult during childhood as well as in adulthood.

Traditionally in India and across the world, primary stereotypic role of women is marriage and child birth and family care and to be confined in the private sphere. Stereotypic role of men is outside the four walls of household and do work away from home in the public sphere. Such male-female stereotypic role is called as 'gender division of labour'. Gender division of labour is a stereotypic representation of the socio-cultural pattern of a society rooted in the biological differences between men and women and the respective reproductive and productive role of women versus men. Gender stereotypes also reinstates that women have to put their family first, before her own self; in contrast to men for whom his own life and individuality should predominate family interests. Women are glorified of her 'womanhood' as loving, caring, nurturing,

sympathetic, compassionate, forgiving, emotional, and so on. As against manhood that reflects strong, brave, authoritative, assertive, independent, career-oriented, competitive, and so on. Women are stereotyped to possess inherent beauty and sex appeal. Woman's body is not her own, but to be dedicated for man or men in her life. Male member of the family is to be the financial provider in return of the sexual pleasure derived from women in his life. Men are regarded as initiator and taker of sex, whereas women are giver of body and sex. These overt stereotypes prove harmful, curtailing individual expression and creativity, personal and professional growth, and restricting representation of complementary and integrative qualities of both genders.

Moreover, natural growth of crime and violence against women in India is due to the fact of wide publicity of grossly mistaken gender-based beliefs and perceptions in society. Moreover, those men and women who do not fit into the socially accepted image of female or male gender stereotypes are often regarded as violators of social order and social outcasts and are rejected by their own family. This leads to a gender-biased social environment. However, since 1960s, powerful sociopolitical force and resultant feminist movement and women's liberation movement have been since fighting hard to challenge conventional gender roles and stereotypes; and ever since struggling to redefine the traditional gender stereotypes into modern context of liberty, fraternity and equality.

Equity and Equality

As defined by Reeves and Baden (2000) gender equality denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere. Gender equity denotes the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognising their different needs and interests, and requiring a redistribution of power and resources.

In the context of political, social and economic rights, equality specifically denotes equal access to basic resources and opportunities for all genders to grow and prosper with human dignity and happiness. Gender Equality is a concept used for equal rights, life prospects, opportunities and power for women and men. It is a human rights agenda and an important indicator for country's development. The Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been a major path breaking international law, which brought in the concept of gender equality. There are three principles that make up CEDAW's concept of equality:

- the principle of non-discrimination,
- the principle of state obligation and
- the principle of substantive equality, or equality of results.

Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, Sustainable Development Goal in 2015 and Beijing Platform for Action also aims to achieve gender equality. Gender equality is a broad term, which included women empowerment, equal rights regardless of gender and non-discrimination. It aims at balancing the power relations in all spheres of life among all the sexes. It indicates that people are free to make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and that their various contributions and needs are valued equally (Council for International Development). It signifies that women have same opportunities in life as men. By removing the discrimination in opportunities women can achieve equal status. A level playing field

needs to be set removing all the hindrances in participation and accessibility for women to achieve equality.

Men and women are not exactly alike; nor their needs and interests. Equity simply means fairness or justice in a way people are treated. It aims to provide equal distribution of resources to the people according to their need. Every individual is unique having different strengths and weaknesses. So, they should be respected according to their needs ensuring equal rights, opportunities and obligations. Biologically men and women are different so their needs may also differ. Women may require maternity leave because they give birth but it does not mean women are weak or they should be discriminated. It just means to treat women fairly according to her needs because she is the one capable of giving birth. An enabling environment needs to be created for the natural processes to happen smoothly without letting anyone feel substandard about it. Gender equity denotes the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests, and requiring a redistribution of power and resources.

Gender equity lays emphasis on the justice among men, women and other gender. Gender analysis of needs is necessary as different gender may have different kind of wants and requirements. If we want equal outcomes from men and women, it's necessary to provide different treatment to men and women. An equity approach implies that all development policies and interventions need to be scrutinized for their impact on gender relations. It necessitates a rethinking of policies and programmes to take account of men's and women's different realities and interests. To set a level playing field for both the gender, some special provisions are important for the historically disadvantaged section population. But it does not mean inequality or bias towards men. It acts as facilitating way and overcome the barriers, which have hindered the process of growth of women to their full potential.

Examples of gender equity in Indian context: Maternity leave, prevention of sexual harassment at workplace law, reservations in jobs, Panchayati Raj Institutions etc.

In order to achieve gender equality and equity great efforts are needed from all sides. Government, civil society organizations, feminist organizations, educational institutions, international developmental organizations etc are all part of this goal. It has been realized that it is not only the women who have to struggle for it but also the men and boys have to play crucial role in achieving gender equality and equity. Men and boys are thus, in several ways, gatekeepers for gender equality. Research has repeatedly shown that patterns of gender inequality are interwoven with social definitions of masculinity and men's gender identities. To move towards a gender-equal society often requires men and boys to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to reshape their relationships with women and girls. different

Different structures of power, like caste, class, gender, sexuality, disability interact with each other.

We all live our lives in structures which put us in position of privilege in some situations and in a marginalized position in some other situations. For example, a woman from upper caste is in a disadvantageous position compared to a man from the same caste. However, she is in an advantageous position compared to a Dalit woman or a woman with disability. A woman's level of empowerment will vary, sometimes enormously, according to other criteria such as her class or

caste, ethnicity, relative wealth, age, family position etc. and any analysis of women's power or lack of it must appreciate these other contributory dimensions.

Uma Chakravarti, through her historical research into the Vedic period, argued that 'caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organising principles of the Brahmanical social order'. Chakravarti argued that women's sexuality was controlled in order to protect the purity of the caste. Thus, women were regarded as 'gateways' and their sexuality is regulated through strict endogamous marriages in order to maintain caste purity and ensure patrilineal succession. This interconnection between caste and gender, termed as Brahmanical patriarchy is "a set of rules and institutions in which caste and gender are linked, each shaping the other and where women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between castes". According to her, the control of women's sexuality was done in two ways 1. Spreading the ideology of *stridharma* or *pativrata* i.e. (feminine ideals of chastity and fidelity to husbands) internalized by the women and thus they regulated their sexuality themselves. 2. In cases where women broke these ideological norms, patriarchal laws and customs were in place which gave her natal family or conjugal family the power to regulate her impulses. Lastly, in cases where in the family fails to control women's choices, the King or the authority could ultimately wield his power to control their sexuality.

On the one hand, for the upper caste women upholding the codes of honour, respect and sense of shame are mostly prevalent and they also feel pressured to keep silent about the oppressions against them. While on the other hand, Dalit women are at the receiving end of both Brahmanical patriarchy, wherein they are oppressed by the upper caste men and women, and also Dalit patriarchy, when their own husbands and families exploit their productive and reproductive labour. Dalit women face gender/class/caste oppression in all spheres of their lives, including that of labour. Although stigma is attached to male Dalit manual labours, the nature of the work a Dalit woman does is stigmatized, considered inferior and low. Some of the examples of labour that lower caste women perform may include manual scavenging, agricultural work, midwifery and paid domestic work.

Women form an inherent part of the family as well as integral part of religious communities. Though personal laws are different for different religions, they are all discriminatory towards women. This is not surprising given the patriarchal nature of families as well as religious communities. Religion leads to various forms of inequalities. Men are glorified for renouncing their wives for the sake of God, while the wife is expected to show unquestioning submissiveness to her husband. Moreover, women and their religious practices are a part of the 'private' unlike men who are authorized to participate in the 'public'. Women face various restrictions on entering temples due to beliefs regarding menstruation; many darghas and mandirs don't allow women to enter just because of their gender.

Inequality is the practice for women with disability. Women suffer from double discrimination by virtue of their sex, as well as their disability. This results in many women and young girls being denied their basic human rights. The combination of male preference in many cultures and the universal devaluation of disability can be deadly for disabled females. Disabled women are more vulnerable to domestic violence and disabled girls are likely to find their access to education even more limited than girls in general.

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