

Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Social Sciences

Block

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THEORISING GENDER

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BLOCK 2 THEORISING GENDER

Introduction

This block seeks to help the learners understand the need to theorise gender. Gender permeates out lives in various ways and it is often difficult to see the web of connections and social formations in which gender exists. We need theories in order to help us uncover these and also to think about how they affect individual and collective lives. We will also see that our ways of thinking about gender may itself be caught up in existing power-knowledge systems. Theories help us step back from our commonsense and examine our automatic and natural understanding of gender.

As students of anthropology we need to be aware of the relation between anthropology and the feminist school of thought. It is basically an attempt to dismantle a dominant assumption that anthropology is basically male and Eurocentric and thus incapable of addressing and accommodating the reality of 'diversity' in it. However, this has changed with the advent of postmodern and post-structural feminist theories and it is now time to explore more innovative themes and ways of doing feminism in anthropology as well as anthropological feminism. Moreover, several ethnography-oriented studies began to propose the primacy of understanding each culture in its own terms and contexts. This in a way not only erodes ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases from both of these disciplines but also opens up large avenues for common research.

Anthropological advances in the study of gender have increased the awareness of women within anthropology, in terms of ethnographic studies as well as in sophistication of theoretical analysis. This has challenged beliefs, especially regarding hunting, human origins, women's productive and reproductive roles in society as well as the ability of women to do many of the roles that men do today. Such studies have become of great interest to both men and women.

These concerns and issues of gender and anthropology are covered in the lessons in this block namely: **Unit 1:** Theoretical Notions of Gender; **Unit 2:** Feminist Theories and Feminist Politics and **Unit 3:** Historical Development of the Study of Gender in Anthropology.

UNIT 1 THEORETICAL NOTIONS OF GENDER

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- 1.1 Introduction
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Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate why we need to theorise gender;
- critically examine and evaluate some prominent theories of gender; and
- consider how these can be used in the study of human societies.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

What are some of the prominent ways in which gender has been understood and theorised? In trying to address this question, this lesson begins by trying to unveil some of our commonsensical perceptions of gender. It then proceeds to understand the difference between the notions of “sex” and “gender”. Thereafter it explores the differences between those who consider gender to be an *essential* quality of human beings and those who think it to be *socially constructed*. This chapter will also explore some important modes of theorising gender: a) Psychoanalytical Theories, b) Literary Theories, c) Theory of Gender Performativity, and d) Queer Theory.

1.2 SEEING GENDER

Let's imagine that we are sitting in a tea-shop looking out at the busy road outside. Let's further imagine that as a "time-pass" exercise we dare each other to *see* gender in the world about us. What a simple, unchallenging exercise it would be. We would quite easily be able to identify everyone around us as "man" or "woman", "girl" or "boy". There might be an odd baby or a strangely dressed person who might make us pause. Or perhaps, we might spot a group of *hijras* in the street corner. But for the most part seeing gender is a no-brain exercise. It is everywhere; it is evident, identifiable and already known. So why do we need theories of gender?

Let's place this question on the table and take another look about us. Is it the case that only people are gendered? What about that pink cycle leaning on the lamppost? What makes us think of it as a "lady's cycle"? And the 100 cc bike that is parked beside it, as "100% male"? What makes those pair of blue jeans "lady's jeans", and the other equally blue one "male jeans"? What imparts gender to inanimate things? Then again, look at the people who are nonchalantly lounging on the road. Why are all of them men? Why do all the women look as though they are outside for a purpose—walking briskly to their destinations, waiting for buses, shopping, or some such? Are spaces gendered? Do different people traverse the same space (like the road) in gender-specific ways? Then again, look!—why is it that all the workers in our tea-shop are men and almost all the vegetable hawkers on the road are women? Are different kinds of labour gendered? Are work-spaces? And is it the same in all societies and all times? "Hey", you whisper, "watch the waiter as he bears the bill to that table". The woman is carrying a big handbag; the man's purse is nowhere in sight. But sure enough, the waiter, hands the bill to the man and he unthinkingly digs into his pocket; the woman looks on expressionlessly. Are social expectations, behaviours and interactions gendered?

Activity 1

Conjure up another everyday scenario and attempt to see how gender operates in this circumstance. Consider how you can classify and analyse the ways in which you have seen gender in this context.

Clearly, we are already extending what it means to *see gender*. It turns out now that it is not only people who are gendered. The things we use, the spaces and institutions that we occupy, the manner in which we occupy them, the work that we do, our social expectations, aspirations all appear to be gendered. So what is it we see when we admit that we see gender? Is gender a "noun"—is it objects, people? Or is gender an adjective—properties and qualities that objects and people have which mark them as "feminine" or "masculine"? In other words, is the pink bicycle gendered because of its "thingness" or because of its "pinkness", or both? How can we tell? To examine this puzzle differently: when we saw the gender of people who were around us, what did we see as constituting their gender?

Which returns us to the question we had placed on the table: Why do we need to theorise gender?

Activity 2

Go back to the scene of the tea-shop. Can you differentiate the notion of “sex” and “gender” in that scene?

Also consider whether class, caste, religion, region, race etc. get interwoven with gender.

For instance, we had noted that most women used the road only for passing through. The assumption seemed to be that women could not comfortably inhabit public spaces. And yet, what about the vegetable vendors we saw? Does their gender stop them from occupying “unfeminine” spaces?

We have already begun to answer that question in some measure. We have begun to concede that gender is not something that we see as easily and as effortlessly as we first thought. To analyse what we take to be commonsense, to question what we take as “natural” can be an extremely demanding task. So much so, we often need special kinds of aids in order to see and understand gender. How do we begin to make sense of its immense multiplicity? How do we classify, analyse, and think seriously about its causes, its impact? Theories about gender offer us their explanatory potential.

1.3 THINKING ABOUT GENDER

Of course there have been ways of thinking about gender before the “advent” of feminism. But in this chapter we will concern ourselves only with how certain feminist theories have grappled with the “problem of gender”.

Most histories see the feminist movement as beginning in the 1960s. One of the most significant issues that it sought to do in its “first wave” was to differentiate between “sex” and “gender”. Sex, it maintained describes biological differences between men and women; gender was crucially different. Far from being a synonym of sex, gender pertains to social differences. Sex is seen as the business of biology. It is a label based on hormones, chromosomes and genitalia. “Gender,” on the other hand, refers to a set of characteristics and behaviours assigned to each sex. It is what we would call a cultural or a social construct.

Today this very important distinction between sex and gender has become part of our everyday knowledge. However, when it was first conceptualised, it threw up breathtakingly exciting possibilities. What are some of its implications?

One of the remarkable consequences of separating the idea of sex from gender is to show that there is nothing natural about gender. In other words it challenges the naturalist fallacy of the man/woman dichotomy; it suggests that there is nothing inevitable about our gender. We could be “man” and “woman” in very different ways. Indeed, every society assigns different descriptions to “man” and “woman” and different characteristics to “masculine” and “feminine”. Secondly, it threw up the possibility that gender regimes were changeable. You can imagine the impetus that such an understanding gave to both to feminist theorisation and politics.

However, making a distinction between sex and gender also had other consequences. It meant that early feminists presumed that there were two “opposite” genders which emerged from the two sexes. In other words, they presumed a gender polarisation.

1.4 BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Now that sex and gender had been differentiated there were crucial questions that needed to be addressed: Was “sex” related to “gender”? If yes, how?

These questions have provoked a lot of debates within feminism. You will find that there are broadly two schools of thought. One school—the biological essentialists—believes that biological differences between the sexes are significant and that it is sex that “becomes” gender. In other words, they believe that gender expresses one’s inner, “essential” core; a person is socially a woman because she has a female body and is sexed female. To that extent, they believe that gender cannot be entirely split apart from sex or analysed on its own terms. The other school—the social constructionists—believe that sex and biology is of little importance to the idea of gender. They believe that there is nothing innate about gender; that gender behaviours are learned in particular social environments.

Let’s examine this in more concrete terms: An essentialist is likely to argue that boys are likely to be competitive and aggressive because of their sexual make-up—that “boys will be boys”. A social constructionist would argue that it is not hormones, genitals etc., which engender competitiveness and aggression—that boys are [aggressive] boys because societies socialise them to be so.

1.4.1 Thinking beyond Essentialism and Constructivism

For all their differences, the essentialists and the constructionists share some crucial commonalities. Both of them, for the most part, work with the idea of two genders. Both tease the question of gender but ignore the possibility of problematising the idea of sex.

Meanwhile there have been researches that have shown that sex is as unstable a category as gender. How so?

Most of us who have studied biology presume that females have XX chromosomes and males have XY chromosomes. Anne Fausto-Sterling, in her book *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, explodes this commonsense. She reveals that we have far more complex chromosomal combinations— XY females, XX males, people with XXY chromosomes, with XO chromosomes and so on. In other words, if one were to take chromosomal profiles, we would find that there are more than two sexes.

And so we find that it is important to ask:

- Are there only two sexes and two genders?
- How does gender relate to sex?

Furthermore,

- How do societies produce and regulate gender regimes?
- What are the effects of being gendered?
- Can we begin to imagine what it means to refuse the current gender system?

Activity 3

“The subordination of women can be seen as a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organised and produced.”—Gayle Rubin (p.177)

Consider what Rubin says above:

- a) *What, according to her, are the “relationships by which sex and gender are organised and produced”?*
- b) *How does this produce the subordination of women?*

As we move along to studying particular theories, it might be useful to keep these and similar questions alive in our mind.

1.5 THEORISING GENDER

One of the places from where we can begin to examine the theorisations of the sex/gender system is the work of cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin. In her influential essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, she attempts to trace the socio-historical mechanisms by which the “sex/gender system” is produced. Rubin contends that male dominance is caused not because of biological differences. Instead, she argues it is a result of a) the operations of kinship structures and b) the institution of a sexual division of labour. Let us examine the first one, and then the other.

According to Rubin “kinship systems are observable and empirical forms of sex/gender systems” (1975: 169). She draws on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in order to make the argument that kinship gets forged primarily through the exchange of women among men. Such modes of exchange and allocation of women permit men to consolidate relations with various groups and thereby to accumulate power. In order for such exchanges to be effective, women and their sexuality have to be controlled. This brings us to what Rubin conceives as a chief element of the political economy of sex—the sexual division of labour. It is such a division of labour that creates differences between genders and the subordination of women. According to Rubin, kinship patterns and the economics of sex and gender, together, weave complicated networks of dependency and desire between men and women. This configures heterosexuality and also leads to the “domestication of women”.

One of the critiques made against Rubin’s argument about the political economy of sex/gender is that she fails to demonstrate how it relates to other forms of exchange. In other words what are the interconnections between the exchange of women (sex/gender system) and the exchange of goods and services (economy)? Marxist feminists and socialist feminists have done considerable work in tracing the relationship between these two systems. You will read about their theorisation in the next unit.

For now, we will use Rubin’s widely influential work as a station through which we can move towards other theories of gender. We will first examine feminist critiques of psychoanalysis.

1.6 PSYCHOANALYTICAL THEORIES

Why should we engage seriously with psychoanalytic theories? There are several people who would brush these theories aside because they do not appear to contribute to our understanding of social processes and relations. And yet, without appreciating how the “social” comes to be intertwined with the psychological we will have only a very partial view of how relationships of gender become woven into the very fabric of our self. Without an account of how subjects experience and internalise social relationships, we cannot begin to explain the power of gender regimes—how they get perpetuated, confirmed and resisted.

To simplify a rather complex field we could posit two robust modes of feminist psychoanalytical thought. At the risk of missing many nuances, let us think of them as the “American” strand and the “French” strand. Undoubtedly, they share certain commonalities: they are both concerned with the internalisation of the regimes of sex- gender-sexuality; with how this process begins in early childhood; both tend to give primacy to the mother-daughter relationship. However, there are also significant differences between these two strands.

1.6.1 Feminist Psychoanalytical Thought in America

Much of the feminist engagement with psychoanalysis in this continent began with the controversies provoked by Sigmund Freud’s works. Some early feminists like Kate Millet quarreled bitterly with his thought and condemned them as patriarchal. However, there have also been more positive feminist engagements with psychoanalysis. Such works primarily draw on Freud’s assertion that “psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is...but sets about enquiring how she comes into being” (Freud 1968, 116).

Among the first feminists who sought to uncover the possibilities of Freudian theories is Juliet Mitchell. Mitchell holds that Freud’s theory shows that our psychological development is based on patriarchy rather than biology. Another theorist who concedes the crucial nature of the human unconscious is Dorothy Dinnerstein. She attempts to show how the relations that man forges with woman, nature and history are sourced from the sexual division of labour. Dinnerstein argues that the current organisation of the family is not natural, neutral or private. Another important theorist who examines issues of mothering, child-rearing and its significance to gender relations is Nancy Chodorow and we shall examine her work in some little detail here.

Nancy Chodorow (1978) concentrates on what she calls the “reproduction of mothering.” She begins with the psychoanalytic premise that the child forms its ego (its sense of self) in reaction to the powerful figure of the mother. As an infant, even when it is unable to speak, it feels a storm of desires and dependence which it has no power to fulfill. These experiences are never really forgotten; they remain in the unconscious. It is these that impel our sexuality, our desire for others and for fulfillment in relationships. However, Chodorow maintains that these processes are very different for the male and for the female child. In order to grow into a man, the male child must *deny* its infantile experiences. He has to deny his dependency on the mother in order to claim a rationality that controls and dominates. The female child, on the other hand, does not have to disavow her emotional interactions and connectedness in a similar manner. To Chodorow

these formations are not caused by biology, but by specific social expectations and modes of organisation. They are formed in and through social relations.

Like Rubin, Chodorow sees the family as a central element in the sex/gender system. She focuses particularly on the how only women “mother” and how they produce children with gendered psychological tendencies: i.e. they produce daughters who will go on to become mothers and sons who will remove themselves from affective, care-giving relationships, concentrating instead on public life.

By showing us how the sex-gender system comes to be constitutive of our core identities, feminist psychoanalytical theorists like Chodorow help us see something important. They help us to recognise that popular ideas about “sex roles” and “social conditioning” are simplistic. These ideas conceive of the sex-gender regimes as simply existing “out there” and believe that these regimes will change simply by doing different chores, changing roles etc. They do not take into account the fact that these regimes become internalised in our selves.

A prominent criticism made against theories such as those of Chodorow is that they assume that everyone shares a universal fate. The human unconscious appears to be unaffected by history and by specific political, economic and social contexts. But surely this is not true? Surely the ideas, content and contours of child-rearing differ in different societies? Surely they vary across classes, races and regions? [See box for a further critique that has been made of Chodorow’s theories]

Activity 4

A significant aspect of Chodorow’s work is her critique of individualism. She also critiques the idea of an independent, isolated self which underpin notions of individualism. In place of what she sees as this “masculine” ideal she puts forth the idea of a self that is inextricably inter-personal and relational (Chodorow, 1978).

By glorifying the interpersonal and relational (such as women’s mothering capacities) does Chodorow’s theory confine women into kinship and associational bonds? Does she assign women to weak and “feminine” modes of being individual?

What do you think?

1.6.2 Feminist Psychoanalytical Thought in France

Jacque Lacan’s work has been extraordinarily influential among many “French feminists”—but not only among them. Central to Lacan’s theorisation is the idea of the *symbolic order*. For Lacan entry into language is important. It is crucial to how we become subjects in society. Reality becomes intelligible only in and through language. The Symbolic is the term Lacan uses to indicate how reality becomes meaningful through the mediation of language. Some of the feminist thinkers affiliated with French psychoanalytic thought include Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Sarah Kofman, Catherine Clement, and Helene Cixous. They ask foundational questions about the nature of feminine subjectivity.

We shall stay a while with some of the modes of enquiry initiated by Luce Irigaray. Irigaray critiques Freud’s conceptualisation of woman as the “other” of man—

as the other who complements him. Irigaray calls this “the old dream of symmetry” (p. 47). The “old dream” where there is imagined to be a mirror-like (“specular”—in Irigaray’s term) opposition between man and woman.

The symbolic, the intimate and the social are closely interwoven. Thus we find that women get figured in language and in man’s desires in very similar ways. Irigaray coins a term to signal this— “hom(m)osexuality”. By this term she hopes to indicate that the symbolic and the social are made as: i) an order of the same (homo) and ii) as the order of men (homme). Because man serves as its reference point, it entirely ignores relations among women—especially between mothers and daughters. Women become merely the medium through which men ally with other men. By obliterating the mother (the woman), men are able to forge vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (associational) relations with each other.

In her own work Irigaray seeks to critique the hom(m)osexual order. She does this so as to make a feminine subjectivity possible. Such a project, she believes cannot be successful either by simply reversing sexual difference, or by asserting difference. Both these will only succeed in representing woman in terms of the already existing symbolic order. In other words, women will become intelligible only according to the frameworks already set by “hom(m)osexuality”. Both these modes would, therefore, only strengthen the symbolic, not disrupt it. In order to challenge this order, we need to find a language for feminine subjectivity and of sexual difference. The use of language is therefore a political act for Irigaray. It is a mode of complexly re-shaping the symbolic.

Most psychoanalytic inquiry does not fit comfortably with either the biological conceptualisations of sex or the sociological formulations of gender. Consequently, they complicate the sex/gender debate in feminism. These theories traverse complex ways in which gender becomes embodied, social and experienced as real.

1.7 LITERARY THEORIES

Feminist attention to literature and to language has moved along multiple directions. We have just seen the crucial place that theorists like Irigaray give to language. As you read about Marxist, Postcolonial, Dalit feminisms you will without doubt find evidence of how they re-shape literary criticism and theory. Besides these, there are also feminists who draw upon schools of thought such as semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism and so on. As with the other modes of enquiry, we will confine only to the broad outlines of this theoretical initiative.

One could say, with some degree of truth, that feminist literary theory began with the realisation that representations of women in literature affect the socialisation of women. There are many feminist critics who would hesitate to see literature and other narratives (like films, for instance) as having direct and immediate effects on lives. (For example, if a popular novel/film depicts a man beating his wife, it does not necessarily follow that there will automatically be an increase in domestic violence). Even such critics, however, are likely to argue that representations of women have certain discernible consequences. The belief that drives this criticism is that dominant representations in society hold up certain acceptable modes of being gendered. If heroines are customarily child-like, wide-eyed in their innocence, helpless in the face of adversity, prefer to stay at home

and leave all that is heroic and agential to the men in their lives, then such images would strongly indicate that these are the appropriate ways of being feminine (and masculine) in society.

Activity 5

Following upon some of the feminist initiatives mentioned here, imagine a “field” which you might go to study as an anthropologist.

Speculate on how you can seek out and find women’s voices and texts.

Do you expect all women’s texts to necessarily critique patriarchy?

What are some of the strategies you could use to reveal the ways in which gender is represented in texts?

But feminist criticism does not confine itself only to uncovering stereotypes and challenging “negative” representations of women. It also engages in a range of other critical exercises. For one, it analyses the ways in which patriarchy works in narratives and textual worlds. Besides this, feminist work seeks to recover women’s voices and stories—either by excavating texts that have long been ignored or by retrieving voices that have been forgotten. Feminist literary theory is also involved in revaluing marginalised and belittled texts authored by women. It has not only reclaimed such texts but have also analysed them to uncover their complexities and the possibilities which they offer. While seeking ignored women’s voices feminists have recognised the need to look beyond the genres (forms) that are commonly accepted as literary. They have thus demonstrated the rhetorical qualities of genres as diverse as oral narratives, diaries and songs. They have also found it productive to re-vision the history of mainstream genres. Take the novel in the Anglo-American context as an example. When we read about the emergence of the novel we scarcely ever learn that in its early, formative years most of the writers of novels were in fact women. The novel had not then been a respectable literary genre. In fact, it was seen as trashy. Women who wrote this un-sanctified genre, for an audience comprising extensively of women, served to incubate and foster this form. Today the novel is of course one of the most robust of literary genres.

All these ventures serve to make reading a political act. They also provoke a radical critique of the institutions of literature. Feminists have found the canons of literature—the great texts that constitute literary traditions—to be parochial. They have challenged literary canons for being, predominantly, a listing of men-authored texts. Feminist criticism does not merely seek the token insertion of a few women-authored texts into existing canons. Instead, they promote a thorough-going overhaul of patriarchal attitudes and assumptions. They seek to make evident the ideological base of supposedly neutral “male”stream literary institutions.

1.8 THEORY OF GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Another mode of theorisation that has become very influential is the theory of gender performativity. In her ground-breaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler challenges both essentialist and constructivist theorisations of gender. She argues that even those feminists who rubbished the idea of biology as destiny failed to problematise the idea of two genders. Rather, as we have noted before,

they tended to see the genders—man and woman—as culturally manufactured from male and female bodies. In other words, even these feminists did not seek to question the supposed reality and truth of sex.

One of the most provocative theses that Butler proposes pertains to the idea of sex. She argues that sex is not the primary ground from which gender proceeds. On the contrary it is the effect of gender. This radically revises initial feminist theorisations, for now, it would seem, that it is the idea of gender that produces the notion of sex and not the other way around. In other words, such a formulation would ask: how do we know where we have to look for “sex”, which part of our biology is sex? How can we perceive sex if there is not already an idea of gender that prompted us into such an examination? Butler would argue that it is gender that constructs the notion of sex. It constructs it in such a manner than sex appears as the pre-discursive and “natural” ground for itself—i.e. gender. In Butler’s own words, ‘the performance of gender retroactively produces the effect of some true and abiding feminine essence or disposition.... Moreover [...] gender is produced by ritualised repetition of conventions, and [...] this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality’ (1997b: 144).

What then is gender? Clearly, gender is not the cultural expression of a biological core. It is the effect of social performances. What does it mean to see gender as a performance?

Butler draws the term “performativity” from linguistics and the theory of language. According to J. L. Austin, in a performative utterance, the utterance is the action that is performed. A classic example he gives is when someone says ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’. What is happening here? Such an utterance does not *describe* the person doing something (like for instance an utterance such as “I am running” does—which describes an action “I” do). A performative utterance like the one above does what it refers to—i.e. it is in the very utterance that a ship gets named. There is no “inward” performance; the outward performance is all that we have. It is this idea that Butler brings to the idea of gender with dizzying implications. In *Gender Trouble* Butler argues that gender is an external performance without a corresponding internal (f)act. That there is an internal, anatomical sex that causes gender is a fiction; and this fiction is produced by gendered performances.

It must be noted that performativity is not the same as acting (performance) in a theatre. Butler clarifies that there is no stable subject that self-consciously acts (gendered) roles as actors do in theatre. It is in the very act of performing gender that we become persons.

Judith Butler’s work clearly signals an epistemic shift—a shift in our knowledge of what is gender and what it means to be woman. But it is not only epistemology that preoccupies Butler; she is also concerned with the politics and the ethics of gender. She holds that gender is a norm. It regulates how subjects must be; it also serves to exclude and ab-norm-alise those that do not conform. This is primarily done through the heteronormative matrix—the norm by which there is believed to be two sexes/genders (man-woman) that are seen as companions and partners to each other. Heteronormativity determines that only certain bodies which are appropriately and heterosexually gendered matter; others are deemed not to matter. These “others” are not seen as subjects at all. They are merely the object.

However, according to Butler, this sex-gender regime is constitutively unstable. This is evidenced by the fact that the performance of gender cannot simply be a one-time event; something that can be done once and thereby accomplished and held secure for ever-after. On the other hand, one must continually and constantly reiterate gender performances. One must continually identify with the norm and repudiate the abject. But this also makes it foundationally unstable because no two iterations can ever be the same. In this Butler sees the possibility for change. Change is what is inevitable with each iteration. These allow for multiple (not just two) articulations of gender. They yield the subversive potential of gender confusion and of ‘gender trouble’.

This idea offers us a corridor to move into Queer theory—a theory which seeks to reveal the falseness of heteronormativity’s claims to naturalness.

1.9 QUEER THEORY

The term “queer” started out as a word to abuse homosexuals, but it has now been adopted as a coalition term for all those who wish to show the hegemony of heterosexuality and to demonstrate the hollowness of its claims.

It is also a place-holder for the theoretical initiatives that have emerged from lesbian and gay studies. But queer theory is not just another name for lesbian-gay studies. It is different from the latter in that queer theory is not based upon any one stable identity. It even calls into question identities like “man” and “woman” by inserting issues of drag/cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity, transgender and transsexuality. The idea of being queer, challenges the easy fit that is usually assumed between sex-gender-and sexual desire, where the one leads seamlessly into the other.

One of the strongest criticisms against queer studies is that it has suddenly become a “sexy” and fashionable mode of enquiry that has been adopted by funding agencies, academic institutions, publishing industry etc. Many suspect that it has become conceptually and politically moribund.

There are others who hold that queer resists the idea of being an identity-category. Unlike identities, queer is not self-evident and already known. It is a category that is constantly in formation.

1.10 SUMMARY

In this unit we have examined some of the theoretical approaches to gender. We have examined how each of these theories understand gender and relate it to the idea of sex. We have seen that these theories take a wide a range of concerns and focus on the individual, the institutional, the interactional or a combination of the above.

It is time now to revisit the question that we started out with. Why do we need to theorise gender? From what we have traversed in this chapter so far, it would be evident that precisely because gender permeates out lives in various ways; it becomes difficult for us to perceive it in its details and in its complexities. It is often difficult to see the web of connections and social formations in which gender exists. We need theories in order to help us uncover these and also to

think about how they affect individual and collective lives. We have also seen that our ways of thinking about gender may itself be caught up in existing power-knowledge systems. Theories help us step back from our commonsense and examine our automatic and natural understanding of gender. One might well ask—but why do we need so many theories? Since various theories focus on different aspects of our complex and sometimes contradictory social arrangements, a multiplicity of theories help us better to understand the nuances, intricacies and dynamics of societies.

Before we conclude this unit it would also be useful to problematise the idea of theory itself.

To “do theory” is often understood as doing a difficult, esoteric activity. In feminist discourse “theory” is a much contested term. Are there some understandings that are non-theoretical, or naively-theoretical? Is theory different from politics? Questions such as these continue to be posed and addressed. As one makes these distinctions one must keep in mind the power-relations that underpin these understandings. As you move on to the next unit you must continue to be alert to how the theories that feed into and draw from feminist politics conceptualise gender.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Why do we need to theorise gender? How is its relation to sex and to biology understood?
- 2) Examine how each of these theories locate gender—the individual, intimate, institutional, interpersonal or a combination of these?
- 3) Is theory different from power? Discuss.



UNIT 2 FEMINIST THEORIES AND FEMINIST POLITICS

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Liberal Feminism
- 2.3 Radical Feminism
- 2.4 Socialist/Marxist Feminism
- 2.5 Multicultural Feminism
- 2.6 Gender Resistance Feminism
- 2.7 Social Construction Feminism
- 2.8 Postmodern Feminism
- 2.9 Summary

References

Suggested Reading

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the historic importance of merging the discipline of anthropology with feminism;
- dismantle long standing suspicion between these two domains and probe the importance and possibility of embedding them together; and
- comprehend that this is done by knowing different school of feminist thought and how and where they can be neatly collaborated with the discipline of anthropology.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between anthropology and feminism is somewhat uncertain and problematic. This is because of the andocentric bias that exists within the discipline of anthropology. However, famous feminist anthropologist like Henrietta Moore (1994) argued that the problem with anthropology is not its bias towards women, but with its interpretation, placing them in the whole research and understanding them. It explains that the unease that exists between feminism and this particular discipline can be solved by placing women at the centre of research. This understanding has led to the formulation of several feminist anthropological researches from 1970s onwards. It is in this context that it is important to understand different feminist theories and its broad politics. However, it is important for an anthropologist student to remember at least a few broad predicaments that come up while studying feminist theory:

- 1) Anthropology postulates that gender oppression is not universal. This is because
- 2) The concept of 'woman' is also not universal and hardly stands any generalisations.
- 3) Anthropology basically focuses its research on non-western traditions, whereas most of the mainstream feminist theories emanate from western societies. Thus, there is always a potential risk of Eurocentric existing in both the disciplines. The risk comes from the colonial legacy of anthropology which was, after all a historical offshoot of colonial expansion. It also exists in feminist theory due to their origin in the west.

Feminist anthropologists do claim that they aim at removing this systemic and epistemological gap that exists between these two schools. But, the feasibility and practicability of grafting western specific feminist assumptions on the body of the local anthropological cultures is also severely contested. It is therefore, important to understand the historical development of feminist theory and its broad politics.

2.2 LIBERAL FEMINISM

This is also called first wave of feminism which basically was founded and propagated in the west. This school of thought emphasises on 'equal rights' in the realm of education, jobs, law and so on. Their ideology is basically liberal individualism. They argue that women are capable of performing like men if they are given equal opportunities. They resist any kind of interference either it is from the state or society. They are also called "classical liberal feminists" or "equity feminists". They see law as a crucial instrument in both hampering and improving the role of women. Therefore, they hold that feminism's political role is to bring an end to laws that limit women's liberty in particular. Interestingly, they are also against any special privileges for women.

Cultural libertarian feminists in this school of thought do recognise patriarchy as a main source of oppression in societies like USA. But they mainly conceive of freedom as personal autonomy. They argue that state should cooperate to enhance conditions that allow women to exercise her autonomy. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan etc belong to this school of thought. Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) argued that woman should strive to have a personhood of her own because she possesses equal intellectual and rational capacity.

This school is mainly criticised for being moderate, uncritical and shallow for it fails to offer any comprehensive analysis of women's oppression.

2.3 RADICAL FEMINISM

This school locates woman's oppression in the locus of biology (sex) and gender. Sex being the physical attributes differentiating men and women, gender is entirely a social construct made for the benefit of patriarchy. They see woman's oppression as the major violence happening in the society. Since they see biology as oppression, they discourage marriage, reproduction, heterosexuality and so on.

Shulamith Firestone, Susan Brownmiller etc., belong to this school. Some of them {for instance Shulamith Firestone (2003[1970])} simply paraphrase Marxist analysis of class by replacing it with sex. Some of the early generation radical feminists argue that sex is basically violence therefore any form of sex ranging from intercourse to rape is perceived as a form of violence by them. They argue that men are biologically equipped to rape and women to be violated. The other main area that they resist in biology is the process and activity of reproduction. They argue that a new radical reproductive technology ought to be developed so that even men will be able to conceive and reproduce children. Until and unless this becomes feasible, they claim that women should shun having sexual relations with men and stick to lesbian and other non-reproductive, non-heterosexual sexual activities.

They see patriarchy as a transhistorical phenomenon and an oldest form of oppression. They locate the root cause of women's oppression in patriarchal gender relations, as opposed to legal systems (as in liberal feminism) or class conflict (as in socialist feminism and Marxist feminism.) Therefore they seek to abolish patriarchy. Early radical feminists posited that the root cause of all other inequalities is the oppression of women. Later generation of radical feminists acknowledge the simultaneous and intersecting effect of other independent categories of oppression as well. These other categories of oppression may include oppression based on gender identity, race, and social class and so on. However, this school is condemned for its biological reductionism and parochialism.

2.4 SOCIALIST/MARXIST FEMINISM

This school believes that gender division of labour is the root cause for women's inequality. The fact that men have historically been having control over means of production, capital, terms of market etc., is the main factor for oppression against women. Women, on the other hand, have been historically relegated to domestic labour like household work, reproduction, raising children etc. Domestic labours do not have exchange value like the productive labour. This school argues that gender oppression is always associated with class oppression. Removal of class inequalities, correcting economic relations would automatically lead to the emancipation of women.

They focus upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life and argue that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. It makes use of both Marxist ideology of class oppression and radical feminist ideology of gender oppression in their theorisation. Further, socialist feminists see women's liberation as a necessary part of larger quest for social, economic and political emancipation.

Marxist feminism believes that women's liberation is feasible only with the replacement of capitalism with classless society. Marxist feminism's foundation is laid by Engels in his analysis of gender oppression in his seminal work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972 [1884]). He argues that women's subordination is not a result of her biologic disposition but of the economic mode of production that prevails in a particular society. Women's subordination to men is because the source and mode of production are under the control of men historically. He hypothetically studies history from this point of view and concludes that women's liberation is possible only with the change

in economic mode of production and production relations. Unlike socialist feminism, Marxist feminism pays less attention to social and cultural aspects of gender oppression. Clara Zetkin and Eleanor Marx were some of the prominent intellectuals in this school of thought.

There is severe criticism against both Marxist/socialist feminist schools of thought. Gayle Rubin is one of those who reacted strongly to this school of thought. She wrote extensively on subjects including sadomasochism, prostitution, pornography, and lesbian literature as well as anthropological studies and histories of sexual subcultures and so on. In her essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, she coins the phrase “sex/gender system” and criticizes Marxism for what she claims is its incomplete analysis of sexism under capitalism, without dismissing or dismantling Marxist fundamentals in the process.

Radical feminism, which emerged in the 1970s, also took issue with Marxist feminism. Radical feminist theorists stated that modern society and its constructs (law, religion, politics, art, etc.) are the product of males and therefore have a patriarchal character. According to those who subscribe to this view, the best solution for women’s oppression would be to treat patriarchy not as a subset of capitalism but as a problem in its own right. Thus, elimination of women’s oppression implies elimination of male domination in all its forms.

2.5 MULTICULTURAL FEMINISM

This school was found and promoted by non-white women like African-American, Latina, native American, Asian women etc. They see and resist white racist solipsism in white mainstream feminist theory and politics. They find white feminist theories not only inadequate but prejudiced to acknowledge and address non-white women’s issues. They argue for multiple schools of thought like ‘womanism’ etc. Bell Hooks, Elizabeth Spellman, Patricia Hill Collins are prominent multicultural feminists.

Main emphasis of this school of feminism is to focus on the intersectionality of oppression. Gender is not a sole cause of oppression, but only one of the causes. Some even argue that it is not even a major cause of oppression. They put coloured (non-white) women’s oppression in a broad context of slave trade, colonialism, capitalist monopoly, imperialism and so on. Women’s oppression is contingent upon the other socio-economic contexts like where she comes from, her race, class position and so on. Thus, it is not possible to have neither a monolithic theory nor agenda for liberation. Therefore, they strongly argue for “group-differentiated rights”.

It has been used as an umbrella term to characterise the moral and political claims of a wide range of disadvantaged groups, including African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled, immigrants and so on. This school is closely associated with “identity politics,” “the politics of difference,” and “the politics of recognition.” They all refer to revaluing historically disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation by giving them agency all over the world. It also deals with economic imbalances and other social systems apart from the entity of culture. However, they do give overt emphasis to culture.

Due to their overemphasis on culture, they are often clubbed with postmodern and poststructuralist feminist schools of thought as well.

Apart from the African American feminists, women from immigrant communities do embrace this stream of thought. They emphasise on the role of language and religion. Black feminism and multicultural feminism are distinct but related ideas: the former highlights victimisation and resistance whereas the latter highlights “cultural life, cultural expression, achievements, and the like. Their claims for recognition are demands not just for recognition of aspects of a group’s actual culture but also for the history of group subordination and its concomitant experience. This school is challenged for giving more emphasis to culture and neglecting other important factors like politics, economics and so on.

2.6 GENDER RESISTANCE FEMINISM

The radical, lesbian, standpoint, psychoanalytic feminists argue that gender inequality cannot be made equal through gender balance because gender dominance is so ingrained in the system. This school holds that formal legal rights alone would not curb gender inequality because it is structured. They study gender order from the feminist perspective and expose the hidden hierarchies among institutions, daily practices that allow men to control women’s lives. They call this domination patriarchy, and attribute all oppression against women to this structure. Politically, they argue that it is not enough to acquire gender balance or gender mainstreaming. Hence they developed an important theoretical insight which is the power of gender ideology. Gender ideology is nothing but the body of values and beliefs that constitute and support gendered social order. They argue that gender inequality has been established and sustained by major world religions that argue men’s dominance is nothing but a reflection of God’s will. They argue that sciences also subscribe to it by saying that gender oppression is a result of genetic or hormonal differences, legal system denies full citizenship to women, mass-media, sports, pornography etc., encourages male power and objectification of women. According to them men exploit women in all aspects. Women’s intellectual and cultural expressions are repressed due to phallogocentric nature of society.

It focuses on how men and women are different socially, cognitively, emotionally and so on. They explain that women should form separate woman-centered communities, institutions and so on. Gender resistance feminisms want women’s voices and perspectives to reshape the gendered social order. They confront the existing gendered structure by turning it upside down. They value women and womanly attributes over men and manly attributes, emotional sensitivity over objectivity, nurturance over aggression, parenting over competition and so on. Radical feminism in particular is against men’s sexuality and sexual violence.

This school tends to be confrontational in challenging the confines of male domination. They resist by putting women first. They argue that women should create their own spheres in politics, culture, religion, education and so on. While the systemic violence against women demands continued political engagement with the larger society, woman-only spaces are needed for refuge, recreation, religious worship, cultural production and so on. They stress the importance of countering the negative evaluations of women by valourising their characteristics, mothering capacities, by encouraging pride in women’s bodies and by teaching

women how to protect themselves against sexual violence. Their focus on standpoint is a major theoretical contribution. Standpoint is a worldview from where one is located or situated in the society. Women's voices and experiences are the sources for standpoint theory, they do insist on women-centric perception and politics as well. This school resonates, to some extent, the extremism of radical feminism. Thus, this school is also criticised for being partial to women.

2.7 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION FEMINISM

This school of feminism argues that gender is a biological fact with social implications. The social group 'women' is the creation of masculine gaze. John Berger succinctly puts: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." They are socially constructed through culture, theory, laws, media, day-to-day routines of a given society and so on. Prominent theorist Dorothy Smith draws heavily on social construction theory, and argues that sociological theory as constructed by men gives a distorted picture of women's experiences, and that any theory which ignores the perspectives of women is necessarily incomplete.

There is upcoming research on women and popular media. They argue that even the way we watch media is split into two broad categories between active/male and passive/female. Women are generally displayed as objects of pleasure and their appearance is meant to serve strong visual and erotic male desires. The kind of labour that women put into media is also divided according to these sexual demarcations. This heterosexual division of labour controls the narrative structure, making and projection of the entire media domain. Man is always the spectator and woman always assumes the role of exhibition. In this way, it is the male fantasy and necessity that controls the mass media. Consequently, women always continue to watch and survey themselves constantly. She is both the watcher and watched at. She has to watch everything she embodies and everything she does. This way of thinking is implanted by men throughout history with the aid of several institutions, principles and processes. Thus, every woman carries a surveyor in herself and that surveyor is a man.

This school also argues that sexual difference is a social construction. Women are expected to master the art of femininity and achieve feminine body. She suffers continuously to keep herself presentable to the male eyes. In the contemporary patriarchal world, the needs and fantasies of men do dwell in the consciousness and commonsense of most women. Her own understanding and her own needs and desires are constituted and configured by what men expect of her. Thus several subtle forces of social control operate on women. Women do respond to non-verbal cues as much as they do to verbal ones. They set the environment in which the power relationships of the sexes are acted out and the ordained status of each sex is reinforced. These status inequalities are communicated in interpersonal behaviour and social relationships of day-to-day lives. This school sees women only as victims of social construction and is totally oblivious to women's own contribution (directly or indirectly) to these constructions. It is somewhat unreal to assume that all social constructions are anti-women or that all of them are basically produced by men.

2.8 POSTMODERN FEMINISM

This school includes both postmodern and poststructuralist theory. Postmodernism built by Michel Foucault, Simon de Beauvoir, Derrida, Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva can be termed as the prominent postmodern feminists.

This school believes that sex and gender are mere constructions of language. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), for instance, criticises the distinction drawn by previous feminisms between (biological) sex and gender (social construction) which is irrelevant to understand the realities of gender oppression. Apart from their emphasis on language, they also believe in extreme relativism, diversity and resist any sort of essentialism. They contest that there is anything like truth. For them truth is absolutely relative. They, thus tend to deconstruct the very notion of truth.

Luce Irigaray is a psychoanalyst whose primary focus is to liberate women from men's philosophies, including the ones of Derrida and Lacan, on which she's building. Irigaray takes on Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of child development to criticise the notion of Oedipus complex. She proposes three strategies for woman to retain her individual identity and they include: create a gender neutral language, engage in lesbian and autoerotic practice and mimic the caricatures men have imposed on women.

But, the modern history and epistemology always revolves around a settled notion of truth and the very meaning of modernity and its associated structures do emanate from this faith and foundation in this settled idea of truth. Since this school fails to offer any single explanation or solution for women's problems, it is criticised for not offering any path of action and practical politics.

2.9 SUMMARY

The present unit tried to focus on the relation between anthropology and feminist school of thought. It is basically an attempt to dismantle a dominant assumption that anthropology is basically male and Eurocentric and thus incapable of addressing and accommodating the reality of 'diversity' in it. However, this was the assumption that was broken free with the advent of postmodern and post-structural feminist theories which both lend and borrow from anthropology both in terms of theory and politics. Thus, it is now time to explore more innovative themes and ways of doing feminism in anthropology as well as in anthropological feminism. Moreover, several ethnography-oriented studies began to propose the primacy of understanding each and every culture (whether the study is conducted by feminists or anthropologists) in its own terms and contexts. This in way not only erodes ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases from both of these disciplines but also opens up large areas and aspects for common research.

The other purpose that the unit tried to serve is to trace the historical trajectory of different schools of feminist thought along with their limitations. This helps us to understand how the politics and discourse of feminism has been evolving. Such a study of evolution does ensure that feminism is not a narrow discipline but does carry lots of potential to transform itself according to changing times

and histories. The same is the case with the domain of anthropology. Therefore, it will be helpful for a student of anthropology (and feminism as well) to understand and reflect upon the contents, developments and possible confluences of these two disciplines.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Explain the basic ideological tension between the discipline of anthropology and feminist theory. Do you think that this gap can be filled? Justify your argument.
- 2) What are the main over lapses and contradictions between different schools of feminist thought?
- 3) Why is it important to merge the disciplines of feminism and anthropology?

UNIT 3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY OF GENDER IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Gender in Anthropological History
- 3.3 Significant Contributors
- 3.4 Gender in Indian History
- 3.5 Developments in Indian Feminism
- 3.6 Critical Approaches
- 3.7 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



Having gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the history of gender in anthropology;
- know the important figures who have made significant contributions to this field of study;
- have an idea of the history of gender understanding in Indian society as well as recent developments; and
- learn about critical views and current directions.

The rights of women are sacred. See that women are maintained in the rights attributed to them.

- Prophet Mohammad

It is through woman that order is maintained. Then why call her inferior from whom all great ones are born.

- Guru Nanak

Well, it's hard for a mere man to believe that woman doesn't have equal rights.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years people have begun to understand women better and found that traditional statuses and roles do not tell the entire story about them. There has been a need to deal with women through a variety of issues like their relationship with sex ratios, births, deaths, illness and health, education, work as well as their relationship with men. All of these issues have been complicated by the fact that

the biology, psychology and power relationships in society were incompletely understood. As studies on women grew, it began to be understood that some of these problems of bias in studying women could be bypassed to a certain extent by studying them through the reflected images, as it were, of the way they were visualised by others, like looking at the literature on women available in different periods of historical time.

Box

Patriarchy means a system of society or government in which the father or the eldest male of the household is the head of the family and descent is maintained in the male line. It is also system of society or government in which the men have power and women are largely excluded from it. Thus, one may have a society or a community arranged in patriarchal lines. The term seems to have originated in the mid-seventeenth century through medieval Latin and through the Greek patriarkhia, or patriarkhes, meaning 'ruling father'. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Much research has also clarified that sexual roles and statuses may not have merely two polarised sexes, as much advertising would have us believe, but a much more complex and multiplicity of relationships. The study of the interactions between these posited and contested realities of sexual roles and relationships then came to be known as gender studies. Today, women are not only striving for equality, departments of gender and women's studies are commonplace in universities around the world. Such departments did much to begin a holistic understanding of women in society. Also, journals in the social sciences often had sections on recent advances in women's studies from time to time as well as seminars/workshops/conferences held on this issue.

However, most of these departments studying women were often situated in Arts/Humanities. As a result, the biological aspect of the study of such issues were often ignored or paid only lip service to. It was the development of anthropology in the early years of the twentieth century that led to true holistic ideas and conceptions of women and gender relations that bridged both social as well as biological dimensions. These dimensions would be most usefully handled for ensuring gender equality in the future.

3.2 GENDER IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HISTORY

Younger children begin by believing that all children are equals. As they grow up, they gradually start distinguishing biologically between male and female and also by understanding differences between them. Today, in many societies, there is a belief in the inherent inequality between men and women. Some people believe this is due to the very clearly seen differences in the biology of men and women. However, over the years, we have learnt that these differences, often cultural, are perpetuated, maintained and reproduced within communities. The purpose of this kind of a course is to show that a better understanding of this process may eventually lead to a more equitable relationship between genders. Here, we shall begin by looking at the history of this understanding between men and women.

In North America, it has been noted that anthropology has contributed the most towards ideas of sex, gender and women in feminist anthropology. The historical development of feminist ethnography may be seen in four different stages. For Visweswaran (1997), they are characterised by the following periods:

Stage 1 began in 1880 and continued to 1920. At this point in time biology was seen to determine social roles and gender was not seen to be any different from sex. However, it was beginning to emerge as an object of analysis, for example, in the works of those like Elsie Clews Parsons. It was also an era when anthropological sensitisation to these issues was working very well. For instance, when E.B. Tylor addressed a gathering of the Anthropological Society of Washington in 1884, he stated that anthropologists needed to include the work of women as part of field ethnography. Also Elsie Clews Parsons in 1906 suggested that women needed to conduct ethnography since they would be better able to gather data from women informants. In fact, one parallel or 'double' movement that began during this period was not only the idea that gender/sex/woman's issues needed to be studied specifically, they were also claiming that by this method a stage of equality would be reached where the category of 'women' or 'men' could be erased altogether.

Stage 2 began in 1920 and continued till 1960. This period marked the separation of sex from gender since it was observed that sex did not describe gender roles completely, for example in the works of Margaret Mead and others. Others who worked at this point included Ruth Landes, Ruth Underhill, Gladys Reichard, Phyllis Kaberry, Zora Neale Hurston, Ella Deloria and Hortense Powdermaker. All these authors grappled with the issue of understanding and unraveling issues relating to cross-cultural understanding of sex and gender even as they themselves lived and struggled through similar sex/gender representations in their own societies.

Stage 3 began in 1960 and continued till 1980. Here, the distinction between sex and gender was elaborated into more complex ideas of how the sex/gender system operated in different societies. Biological facts were often used as a basic idea to create particular gender roles in different societies, for example in the works of Gayle Rubin and others like Michelle Rosaldo, Louis Lamphere, Rayna Rapp, M. Kay Martin, Barbara Voorhies, Betty Friedan, Laura Bohannon, Elizabeth Fernea, Eleanor Leacock, Diane Bell and Jane Goodall. In 1971, courses in gender and anthropology were started for the first time in Stanford University. This was also the period when Standpoint Theory first became an important method for understanding how issues relating to sex/gender were becoming central standpoints and bases for understanding relations of women in other societies. Implicit within this was a critique of the authors' own society and the gender relations therein. It was felt that these issues were themselves showing the political, sex/gender and other biases of the researchers themselves. Thus, this position of the researcher itself became a problem. In later years, much analysis was done not on 'other' cultures but on the understanding of certain anthropologists of such cultures and how it reflected on their own.

Stage 4 began in 1980 and continued till 1996 at least, and showed that categories like sex and gender themselves were a problem, since they were both social categories and thus had biases. Thus the idea of a 'woman' as a biological and universal category was seen to be a case of 'gender essentialism', as in the works

of Frankenberg and others like Michelle Rosaldo, Judith Butler, Nadia Serematakis, Dorinne Kondo, Joni Jones and Angie Chabram. It has become imperative to incorporate ideas relating to the incorporation of feminine voices from the field. The location of such studies also shifted to studies of work places, work culture, women's culture, therapeutic culture, the participation of women in popular culture, self-reflexive narratives of women anthropologists in the field (like that of Margaret Trawick), accidental ethnography, recombinant family life, communities of practice, cultural constructions of masculinity, gay and lesbian studies, as well as issues relating to cross-cultural analysis of reproductive rights.

It is here that an important critique emerges regarding such discourses, for some anthropologists began to claim that feminists were also alienated from other women in their own countries but were also totally different from women's experiences in other countries, especially in the Third World. Thus, feminism needed to become involved with local forms in other countries, especially with other local and nationalist movements. This diversity would thus generate different histories of such feminist ethnography.

It is in this context that one must posit Stage 5 of the history of feminist ethnography. This period would begin from 1996 and go on to the current period. It is at this point that one may show that Indian studies on sex/gender have developed in different trajectories. Such alternative histories for India have already been fashioned.

For others, like Gellner and Stockett (2006), there have been three waves of feminism. They have not been chronological but overlapping. Second wave theories are still relevant today. In the first wave, from 1850 to 1920, there was an attempt to incorporate the voices of women in the ethnographies that were produced. Mostly, though, ethnographies were produced by males and the data was collected from male informants. This included data regarding women also.

In the second wave, from 1920 to 1980, anthropological study moved into academic spheres. Through this movement, it separated the concept of sex from gender, which had earlier been used interchangeably. Thus, gender became a term that was used to refer to men and women, the relationships between them and the inherent cultural construction of these two categories. It was shown that the definition of gender varied from culture to culture. This led feminists to shy away from broad generalisations. They refused to accept earlier dichotomies like male/female and work/home. Studies in this period often had a materialistic tinge, since many researchers favoured the use of Marxist theories regarding social relations regarding women, reproduction and production. Many focus on the linkages between gender and class, the social relations of power and the changes in mode of production.

In the third wave, which began in the 1980s, gender asymmetry was no longer the only concern and there was an emphasis on studies in archaeology and physical anthropology as well. There is an acknowledgement of differences through categories like class, race, ethnicity, etc. Gendered studies in archaeology have been slower but there has been a recent spate of such studies, that show feminine usages of tool-usage, pottery, handicrafts, house-making and decoration, among other things. Often, this period focuses on differences between women, thus

leading to discussions on categories like age, occupation, religion, status and the interaction between these categories. Power is seen to be very important since it is intricately linked to identity, as well as studies on production and work, reproduction and sexuality as well as the state and gender. This has ensured that many different focuses have emerged and a unified approach or theoretical perspective has been lacking during this period. In fact, the fragmented nature of the subject of study has itself ensured this kind of shattering, which has often been a hallmark of postmodern studies.

Feminist anthropologists had objected to the fact that anthropological discussions regarding women had focused on studies relating to kinship, family and marriage. This has led to an incomplete understanding of the totality of human experience. The use of politically correct terms, instead of the ubiquitous 'man' also needed to be enforced. Since this language shaped worldview, it was obvious why studies on men took prominence. The approach of some feminists was against a Durkheimian systemic approach, which saw dichotomies as being clearly demarcated. Society was seen by them to be more dynamic, since some of their approaches emerge from the Marxist idea of praxis. This kind of cultural determinism of gender was also criticised by Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich. They felt that this was part of an essentialist view where there was supposed to be an essential idea of a male and a female, showing traditional statuses and roles. Here, the passivity of women was often seen to be peacefulness, sentimentality as the idea of nurture, and subjectiveness as self-awareness. Thus, this form of feminism ignores the oppression under which such behaviours proliferate.

Ethnic minorities and African-American anthropologists were also dissatisfied by the issues raised by many of the early feminist anthropologists. They felt that differences between women were celebrated since they were seen as creative and led to change. However, these differences themselves caused misunderstanding and separation. Different women thus experienced different degrees of oppression from patriarchy, which was not shared by all. This was a very Eurocentric idea, as were graduate and undergraduate systems of teaching and learning. Thus, women do not share all these ideas and issues which were brought out by different feminist anthropologists. This variety of experience itself has been a rich source of creativity among gender studies in anthropology at present.

Thus, variety, difference and identity issues have become of paramount importance in gender and feminist studies. As mentioned earlier, power is seen to be an important component. This is because identity is constructed and enacted through a set of practices and actions that are mediated by relations of power. One area where such studies have brought brilliant results has been in queer theory, which has been seen as a post-structuralism reaction against normalcy in the arena of gender and sexuality. This approach challenges the fact that only heterosexual unions and the attendant social institutions are normal (something called heteronormativity). Thus queer theory shows that socially constructed sexual acts and identities consist of many varied components.

3.3 SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTORS

a) **Elsie Worthington Clews**

Born in New York City in 1875, she was born into a wealthy family. She had always been interested in freedom, whether social or personal. The Victorian home she was brought up in made her aware of the problems related to being a woman at that time. She grew up to be a strong-headed person, and went on to conduct her B.A. in Sociology in 1896 at the Barnard College. Later, at Columbia University, she met Franklin H. Giddings, the first full-time professor of Sociology in the US. She completed her M.A. in Sociology in 1897 and a Ph.D. in 1899. She married Herbert Parsons in 1900. She died on 19 December 1941 at the age of 66.

During her lifetime, she conducted many studies on women in America, as well as on the African-American and Pueblo Indian folklore. She gave a series of lectures at Barnard on family and marriage patterns, which became controversial because she used ethnological data to show how trial marriages could be an advantage in society. Her works weaved the problems women faced within the institutions of marriage, family, religion and social etiquette. She also emphasised the requirement of individuals to be free and to have choices. In fact, she hoped to remove the social terms 'man' and 'woman' and to have 'womanhood' as a universal term for all humanity. A variety of her books reflected how women and their lives were ruled by constraints and taboos, confinement and exclusion, that demarcated them from the men. She compared her knowledge of American society with other cultures to make her points, something that later on was used with such effectiveness by Margaret Mead. Her shift to anthropology led her to study folklore, family structures, diffusion and culture history. However, her data on the Southwest tribes was made by studying only one family and a few paid informants. In more secretive pueblos, interviews were conducted in a hotel room or nearby Spanish villages. Parsons focused on women and practices, including offering made by women to get pregnant, taboos relating to birth, postpartum practices and naming ceremonies. It was here, according to Lamphere, that Elsie Clews Parsons became more interested in ethnographic observation, informant narration and the interrogation of natives. The earlier form of feminism had generalised about women's situation from ethnographic examples only.

b) **Hortense Powdermaker**

Hortense Powdermaker was born on 24 December 1900 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and died abruptly in 1970. She had no children and had never married but had a lot of good friends who thought of her as a deeply humane and social person. From high school, she went on to college, majoring in history, graduating with a B.A. in 1921. She began working with Amalgamated Clothing Workers but found the desk job irritating. She then began to organise workers groups, thus gaining more experience in fieldwork. However, even here the desk job irritated her and she joined the London School of Economics and Political Science, where she took classes in social anthropology. She became quite interested and was influenced in her fieldwork by Malinowski, who would give guidelines on fieldwork to his students. Powdermaker felt that these guidelines were very useful and the

students gained a lot from them. They, in fact, became a kind of myth that was woven around Malinowski's detailed data gathering during fieldwork, which Malinowski himself did not always follow. In 1928, Powdermaker received her Ph.D. in 1928. Powdermaker had no interest in an academic career and it was only Malinowski's insistence that persuaded her.

Powdermaker's most important work was *Life in Lesu: The Study of a Melanesian Society in New Ireland* which she wrote in 1933. This followed a bleak period in her life when she had a tough time getting funding for her research, even from Malinowski. She eventually was funded by the Australian National Research Council. It turned out to be classic fieldwork ethnography of the period, with a large ethnographic coverage area and very vivid descriptions. Her fieldwork style and skills reflected those of Malinowski. One weakness of the work was that her fieldwork was not as contemporary in including new elements and aspects that were included by her contemporaries. However, another important work that had been conducted by her was *Hollywood: The Dream Factory, an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie Makers* in 1951. In fact, many who are not anthropologists know of her through this seminal work which was perhaps the only anthropological work on Hollywood. Through these works, Powdermaker showed how women became stereotyped and became 'objects', and how they struggled to improve the conditions of their existence.

c) **Ruth Fulton Benedict**

Ruth Benedict was born in 1887 and became a student of Franz Boas. She completed her Ph.D. in 1923 from Columbia University. She worked on Native Americans and other groups to help her to develop her 'configurational approach', which saw emergent patterns in culture. She thus saw cultural systems working to favour certain kinds of personality types in different societies. She became one of the most important female anthropologists of that period.

d) **Zora Neale Hurston**

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891. She was the first African American woman to study African American folklore and voodoo. She studied anthropology in the 1920s under the tutelage of Franz Boas, who had encouraged her. The data for her work came from her years of growing up in Eatonville, Florida, an all-black area. Her insights and observation came from her anthropological background and she used this well to create fictional works also. She had been the only black student from Barnard who had graduated from there, receiving a B.A. in 1928. She wrote *Mules and Men* in 1935 and *Tell My Horse* in 1938. She also helped to immortalize the images of the folklore of this diasporas Black culture, but she also helped to weave a theoretical understanding of this community as well as give various methodological innovations. She died in 1960. Later, anthropologists have used her work and her life to show how women were being discriminated since she was unable to complete her Ph.D. under Boas and was thus often never mentioned as a significant figure in anthropology because she was a woman and also because she was black.

e) **Phyllis Kaberry**

Phyllis Kaberry was born in 1910. She worked as a social anthropologist with Bronislaw Malinowski, for her Ph.D. Her work was involved with women in different societies, mostly from Africa and Australia. She was also extremely interested in understanding the religious background of the peoples from these regions. Her claim to fame, however, came from her in-depth understanding of the relationships between men and women. She died in 1977.

f) **Margaret Mead**

Margaret Mead was born in 1901. She was a very important figure in anthropology, but she was also a figurehead for women's movements around the world because of a lifetime of researches on the roles of women and their relationships with men in society. She was considered to be an important figure that led the second wave of sex and gender studies in anthropology. Her theoretical approaches borrowed from Gestalt psychology. Gestalt psychology may be summed up by the statement that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts". Hence, Gestalt psychology analysed personality as an interrelated phenomenon than as a sum total or collection of small parts. Margaret Mead's work separated the biological factors from the cultural factors that shaped and controlled human behavior. Her work influenced those of Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, both of whom attempted to build a framework for the growth of this fledgling discipline. Mead's work analysed the overwhelming data on sexual asymmetry that was present in much of ethnographic writing. She died in 1978.

In 1935, she wrote *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, where she explored the linkage between culture and behaviour. Culture was one major factor determining male and female characteristics in society, thus setting up norms for behaviour. The book was a template for a set of alternative set of behaviours as seen in other cultures that could be followed by a more aware American society. In 1949, she carried this idea further in *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*. Through this work, Mead wished to bring in a greater awareness of the differences and similarities in human bodies that lead to our learning and understanding of the sex of the individual, and their relationship to other sexes. She also wished to look at our similar knowledge regarding these issues from other societies, to develop cross-cultural parallels on locating how human beings have reacted in similar situations and what this has resulted in. This exposure to alternative ideas relating to the issue is likely to leave us better off in our understanding and our behavior. Thus, this paved the way for a better understanding and use of the talents of both men as well as women. These analyses regarding males and females influenced much thought on the issue over the years.

g) **Eleanor Leacock**

Eleanor Leacock was born in 1922. She used a Marxist approach in her ethnographic work, arguing that capitalism was responsible for the subordination of women. She talked to English-speaking informants to learn more about hunting practices, thus creating her own hunting pattern to show how the informants were over-generalising. Using this data, she challenged Julian Steward's work on hunting and trapping. She died in 1987.

h) **Sherry Ortner**

Sherry Ortner was born in 1941, becoming one of the early proponents on feminist anthropology after her seminal work on the Sherpas. She created an explanatory model for gender asymmetry, showing that the subordination of women was cross-culturally valid. Using this universal model, she took a structuralist approach to show gender inequality in her 1974 paper titled 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' in the journal *Anthropological Theory*. She showed how women had always been symbolically associated with nature, an issue which has been called ecofeminism. This was because nature as well as women was subordinate to men. She saw women as child-bearers being natural creators while men were cultural creators. Ortner showed how men who did not have a high rank were excluded from things, just like women. She also explained how this subordination of women to men has happened historically, showing that women's psychology and body were shown to be identifiable with nature, while men were seen as being linked to culture. In 1996, she wrote a book on *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*, in which she used a lifetime of experience to rethink the issue of culture and gender.

i) **Margaret Conkey**

Margaret Conkey was born in 1943 and was one of the first to introduce feminism and gender to archeological theory, writing an important paper titled "Archaeology and the Study of Gender" in the journal *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* in 1984. The article criticised current archaeologists for using modern Western ideas to understand sexual division of labour in the past. This understanding was also skewed in the sense that archaeological contexts and artifacts were often attributed to male activities, since this was supported through funding, as well as research time. In fact, the discipline of archaeology was itself constructed around masculine values and norms. In 1991, Conkey and Joan Gero edited a book titled *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, which brought in these issues in an explicit and theoretically informed manner, through original archaeological data from around the world to show the different gender systems operating in the past.

j) **Michelle Rosaldo**

Michelle Rosaldo was born in 1944. She, like Ortner, created a set of explanations at different levels to show how women had become subordinated universally through socialisation processes, culture in general and through the social structure itself. Women bore and raised children and this socio-culturally defined role of mother became the basis of subordination. This limited participation of women in various socio-cultural spheres needed to be understood much more holistically, through an analysis of the larger system. In 1974, Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere edited a landmark book on *Women, Culture and Society*, that showcased a variety of papers on the issue of female subordination and asymmetrical relations. Louise Lamphere, who was born in 1940, was also an important figure in this important issue of dealing with the anthropology of gender and women's status. Michelle Rosaldo died in 1981.

k) **Nancy Scheper-Hughes**

Nancy Scheper-Hughes was born in 1944. Her feminist ethnographies questioned the idea of a universal definition for “man” and “woman”. Her classic book on medical anthropology titled *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* was critical of the concept of innate maternal bonding, since women were forced to favour infants who would survive in harsh living conditions.

Set in the lands of Northeast Brazil, this is an account which finds that mother love as conventionally understood is something of a bourgeois myth, a luxury for those who can reasonably expect that their infants will live.

l) **Gayle Rubin**

Gayle Rubin, an activist and influential theorist on sex and gender politics, was born in 1949. She introduced the concept of the “sex/gender” system which, like Mead, separated biology from behaviour. Her concepts were based on the works of Marx, Engels, Levi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud. Friedrich Engels’ work on *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* became a classic backbone of Marxist theory. Based on Morgan’s idea of unilineal evolution, it became a point of study and basis for a universal understanding of the subordination of women and the use of dichotomies in looking at socio-cultural categories relating to men and women. Using these concepts, Rubin wrote *The Traffic of Women: Notes on the “Political Economy of Sex”*. In this work, Rubin uncovers historically the social mechanisms through which gender and heterosexuality are produced, and by which women are relegated to a subordinate position.

m) **Lila Abu-Lughod**

In her seminal work titled *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories* published in 1993, Lila Abu-Lughod demonstrated that culture was boundless in her sharing of women’s stories. These narratives show that Bedouin women found advantages of their own in a society where there was so much sexual segregation. She also helped to improve the understanding of Western feminists regarding Islam and Hinduism. Thus, feminist and anthropological insights were used to create a critical ethnographic account, thus improving the ability of anthropological theory to adequately understand the lives of women and to critically comment on the way feminist theory seems to appropriate women in the Third World.

Apart from the anthropologists mentioned above, there are also many others. In 1975, Rayna Reiter Rapp edited a book titled *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. In the 1970s, this was considered to be a ground-breaking work, since the articles here were focused on the development of universal explanations. In 2001, Irma McClaurin published *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis and Poetics*, highlighting the fact that black as well as non-Western feminist authors were rarely cited and respected. In 2006, Pamela Geller and Miranda Stockett published *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present and Future* which went beyond current theoretical and ethnographical concerns, attempting to find unity and meaning in a fragmented and disputed field of study, thus creating openings for discussions on performing various roles, pedagogic activity, allowance for multiplicity of roles, differences in behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and practices as well as the important issue of identity.

3.4 GENDER IN INDIAN HISTORY

Historical sources show that in the ancient period, between 1500-1000 BC, which is called the Vedic or Rig-Vedic period, many liberal attitudes marked the relations between men and women. These attitudes included the fact that women were allowed to participate in many religious and social activities. They were also allowed to sometimes choose their own spouse. Women were initiated into Vedic rituals and if they did not wish to marry, could live in their parental house. However, patriarchy was followed and the husband was considered to be of a higher status. Husbands often married many women, a form of polygyny. A widow was permitted to marry the husband's younger brother, to contain her fertility and other services within the family. This latter practice is found to be prevalent in many other parts of the world.

Mention of certain social practices is also seen in the epics like the *Mahabharata* (dated by some to about 12th century BC) and the *Ramayana* (dated to about the fifth century BC). Sita, in the latter text, is often portrayed as an ideal Indian woman since she was willing to give up everything for her husband, thus following him into the forests for fourteen years during Lord Rama's exile. In the former text, Draupadi was shown to have more independence, courage and character. Gandhari also illuminates the fact that a wife who keeps herself blind to support her husband's blindness was ideal.

Jainism and Buddhism became part of Indian society from about the 6th century BC. Both were like religious rebellions against the controlling priestly social order of the period. Jain women from different backgrounds became successful as ascetics. Buddhist women joined the Sanghas, composing verses called *Therigatha*. By 1000 to 500 BC, the status of women in India degraded further. Women became confined to households and were further controlled by purity and pollution taboos. They were kept away from religious and ritual ceremonies. Patriarchal and patrilineal systems were reinforced. Sons began to be considered as better than daughters, especially since women left for her husband's house after marriage. Also, the husband had control over her sexual and reproductive rights, having the power to go in for another marriage if the wife did not bear sons, or for other reasons. There was a lowering of the age of marriage. Women scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi were known from this period, but they were exceptions rather than the rule.

These issues relating to the lack of freedom for women began to be codified into law through the *Dharmasastras* like the *Manu Smriti* and the *Yagnavalkya Smriti* from 500 to 200 BC. Women were not only excluded from other than some domestic affairs, they were not allowed to be educated either. While young, they were supposed to be dependent on their father, after marriage on the husband, and later dependent on their sons, according to the laws of Manu. Marriage at an early age was considered to be unavoidable at this point. Child marriages were common and widow remarriages were rare. *Sati*, or sacrifice of wives of dead husbands on the funeral pyre as well as female foeticide and infanticide became popular.

Islam began to emerge as a major religion in India in the medieval period around the 11th century AD. The system of wearing *purdah* to cover part or the entire body was also prevalent at this point of time among the upper classes like the

royal families and merchants. This became more prevalent among the general public. However, this system spread to many other regions, cultures and religions over the years. Men could divorce their wives and the divorced women could get no support. Many of these rules regarding rights of property and patriarchy already existed in Indian society at the time.

By the end of the medieval period, in the 1600s, when the British came into India, these inequalities that troubled women continued to exist. When the British initially came, they continued to work with whatever social conditions remained without changing them substantially, except in the economic and political spheres. It was only later that they took some interest in social reforms and in this they were often aided by either British citizens who took an interest in Indian culture or Indians.

In 1829, the practice of Sati were banned. This was mostly due to Raja Rammohan Roy, whose ideas were supported by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck. However, they were also ideas propagated by a small but very effective group of people led by Louis Henry Derozio. However, those widows who were not allowed to commit sati faced a lot of problems due to a lack of education and social acceptance. This was the issue fought for by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar whose efforts led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Vidyasagar also supported women's education.

Jyoti Ba Phule in Maharashtra continued this battle to open schools for girls in 1848 and in 1852 opened a school for Dalit girls. He created a home for protecting the children of widows. Other educational institutions were opened in Maharashtra by Maharshi Karve.

Other important acts included the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, which fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and for boys at 18 years. Harbildas Sarda took up this issue and the Sarda Act came into being. In 1976 the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act was enacted thus making the age of women suitable for marriage to be 18, and those of men at 21. Both overtly as well as covertly, the freedom of women was enhanced by the participation of women in the freedom movement and their participation with Mahatma Gandhi and renouncing the existence of dowry.

3.5 DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN FEMINISM

In recent years, a number of feminist movements have emerged, characterised by theorising, acting and mobilising. These feminist movements that we have witnessed of late are the direct outcome of industrialisation and urbanisation and have challenged the existing system which has made women socially, culturally, economically and even politically crippled. The women's movement, like the student's movement, is essentially a middle class movement that has been directed against male chauvinism, patriarchalism in the family and the sexual exploitation of women. In most nations the feminist movement has an urban bias and has been run by white collar middle class women and social workers from middle and upper class non-working women. However, despite this narrow mass-base and elitist control, the feminist movements worldwide have aided (though in varying degrees) the process of women's emancipation by upgrading her self-image, by protesting against social evils like dowry and prostitution and by propagating the message of the equality of the sexes.

In India, feminist publications such as *Manushi*, *Bayja*, *Mahila Andolan Patrika*, *Kali For Women* and *Feminist Network* have been spear-heading the feminist movement. A number of NGOs and voluntary organisations have also taken up the cause of women's upliftment. These organisations, many of whom are being run by women themselves, try to help those women who have been terrorised and victimised by their husbands or in-laws. They also render financial and legal help for the rehabilitation of such women.

The proliferation of such societies is no doubt a healthy development for it will help the women emancipate themselves from social and cultural bondage and turn the man-woman relationship to one of parity. Needless to say, such developments are and will in the future affect the family structure, particularly in terms of the distribution power.

Feminism is to be understood as an idea and as a movement and therefore as a matter of practice. As an idea, it argues for a modification of the existing unequal gender relations in society. It refers to an awareness of such unequal gender relations and a commitment to bring about change. Feminism, as it is understood in the Western sense, is a modern phenomenon, and it has to be understood in the changing context of society, individual and urbanisation.

There are several kinds of feminist movements as discussed in the last lesson. The three important types which we describe briefly here are:

Moderate Feminism

Believes in bringing about the desired changes in the sex roles by altering certain relations of society and it believes that the roots of oppression lie in certain social spheres. It never challenged the total system or the social framework; changes were to be ushered in the existing framework. They believe that the task of social reconstruction lies with both men and women. It emphasises on making both men and women aware.

Socialist Feminism

Argues that the roots of gender inequality lie in property relations. They say that there are traditional mechanisms even in simple societies which do not give women any access to property. They also say that the notion of patriarchy, with its male bias, is also responsible for unequal property relationships. They have viewed patriarchy in a broader sense and have viewed it as an instrument of oppression. The role of existing social and ritual mechanisms has also created unequal gender relations. Dev Nathan and Kelkar in 1991 studied the Jharkhand tribes and found out that institutions of patriarchy have perpetuated gender inequality in property relations. They say that "land rights have always been male rights." They showed how ritual order and beliefs have helped to maintain the patriarchal system. Among the Oraon, ancestor worship exists where, after harvest, the worship is performed and women are excluded from the worship. They believe that the land which they cultivate belong to their ancestors. They believe that the permission of the ancestors is required before bringing the harvest home. The right to use land is bestowed only upon men, as they believe. Many cases in court are beginning to contest such customary laws of the tribes in Jharkhand. The socialist feminists thus believe that property relations have to be modified and hence the structure needs to be changed. They believe that both men and women have equal tasks in reconstruction or allocation.

Radical Feminism

Traces the roots of oppression to the woman's body. Woman is closer to nature and because of the inherent biological differences; one sex has been able to dominate the other. Thus, they seek a biological perspective. They say that most cultures have been a perpetual threat to the women's body and this can be perceived in the constant anxiety in the minds of women like rape, pregnancy, etc. The radical feminists say that a redressal of the problem can be had by using modern technological methods. The women should have greater control over their bodies. Such brands of feminists say that they do not need men for remedying the situation and they have ignored the role of men. Cultural symbols associated with femininity are denounced; some even denounce heterosexual relations which have led to the rise of lesbianism. Women's intrusion in the extra-domestic domain is also advocated.

There are two ways of looking at the family:

- a) The traditional way where family as a group enforces solidarity (e.g. Murdock);
- b) The second perspective is derived from the feminist ideas where the family is regarded as an instrument of oppression.

In the mid-1960s, certain writings appeared where scholars like Betty Freidan and Germaine Greer viewed society as oppressive. They identified the plight of women (in this progressive writing) in the family structure. Family was viewed as a patriarchal unit where women cater only to the men's sexual, reproductive and domestic needs. Within the family setup, women were regarded as incapable and passive and occupied a subordinate position.

Other writings analysed the changing perspective of the family with regard to the impact of feminist movements, which is an offshoot of individualisation and urbanisation. Due to individualisation and education more women are entering the work force from the middle class. These women are breaking down the citadel of the "all-men realm" of the work force. It has given them economic independence, for which they are enjoying the relative freedom in family life. The impact of this can also be seen in the fact that women's issues are discussed more vigorously nowadays, which is making the public conscious about women's issues. This has also led to the reduction of the stigma associated with the discussion of women's issues. Lived-in relationship is emerging as an alternative to marriage, and is mainly found in Western societies. This has given more autonomy to the women and the establishment of households without marriage.

Working women are faced with role-conflict which has led to a trend where both husband and wife have started sharing the household work. Feminism has also led to a lowered birth rate. Crèches and child-care centers have emerged as an alternative to the socialising role of the parents.

Women's needs as persons are also being realised. Women are becoming career-oriented and in this regard marriage problems surface. There has been a rising trend where women have decided to remain single and single-person households are on the rise. There is an increase in solitary mothers where the name of the father is not revealed. This is also now present in India, as a book called *Home Truths* by Deepti Mahendru reveals. These processes are mainly found in the West but India has not escaped these phenomena either.

Critics say that these trends are destabilising trends. It destabilises family in that:

- a) There will be an increase in divorce which the Western societies are already experiencing;
- b) The population rate has become zero in many countries. When women get married late or are given control of their body, the population rate is bound to fall and is a threat to the perpetuation of the human race;
- c) In the case of single parents, children do not get emotional sustenance leading to delinquency;
- d) Health problems emerge due to matrimonial disturbances. New diseases are due to 'unnatural' sexual activities, which are the product of radical feminism;
- e) There has been a rise in mental and psychological problems.

The critics say that the sharing of domestic work is unnatural because it violates the very principle of "natural division of labour." The rise of feminism is challenging the moral fabric of the society and therefore the family will weaken leading to the disintegration of society. There are certain critical relations on the basis of which the whole edifice of social structure rests. However in spite of such criticism, feminism is gaining prominence not only in academic circles but also in the extra-domestic domain.

3.6 CRITICAL APPROACHES

Since these theoretical approaches made their appearance, a number of criticisms have been leveled against them. For some, criticism has been a part of postmodernism, where everything is questioned. However, feminism or gendered anthropology cannot remain true if it is not contested. A major criticism was made by women anthropologists belonging to ethnic minority groups, who claimed that gender issues were mostly focused on by white, middle-class female anthropologists, thus ignoring racism, wealth disparities, and other important issues. This problem, once formulated, was addressed by a large participation from minority groups in anthropological discourses on the issue as well as sensitive portrayals by white, middle-class women anthropologists.

Feminist anthropologists have also been accused of being mirror opposites of the people they most fought against. They began by being critical of having male or andocentric bias, about males who were studying mostly men. However, the opposite case of women studying mostly women also began to be true of the feminists. Thus, the field of study attempted to move away from an 'anthropology of women', and becoming more gender based rather than gender biased.

Feminist anthropology has often been linked to a broader and more politically oriented feminist movement. This tinge of radical ideas often alienates many from the field, as do the polemical pedagogic style attempted by many in the field. Also, its political intent and bias tends to make it very intense, partial, and subjective and it resulted in questioning its merit.

3.7 SUMMARY

The lesson provided us with a tour of the history of gender in anthropology. In it we learnt about different women personalities who have written immensely on gender as part of anthropology. The lesson also delved into the history of gender in Indian society and the changes that have been brought about in recent times. The lesson looks into all these analytically.

At the very least, anthropological advances in the study of gender has increased the awareness of women within anthropology, in terms of ethnographic studies as well as in sophistication of theoretical analysis. This has challenged beliefs, especially regarding hunting, human origins, women's productive and reproductive roles in society as well as the ability of women to do many of the roles that men do today. Such studies have become of great interest to both men and women.

Recent studies of such issues in India indicate that gender studies should incorporate disaggregated data on employment conditions, migration, health access and outcomes, education, skills and training, access to food and nutrition outcomes, use of public facilities, control over private and public assets, access to credit, access to land, access to and impact of flagship schemes as well as fiscal and monetary data before the impacts are going to be felt in the arena of policy and planning (Eapen and Mehta; 2012).

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) Outline the history of gender in anthropology?
- 2) Discuss at least four figures that have made significant contributions to the study of gender in anthropology?
- 3) Discuss the developments that have taken place in Indian feminism.

