

Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Social Sciences

Block

1

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GENDER

UNIT 1

Conceptual Perspectives on Gender **5**

UNIT 2

Patriarchy and Male Dominance **19**

UNIT 3

Discrimination and Subordination **31**

Expert Committee

Prof. Patricia Uberoi
Formerly Professor of Sociology
Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

Professor Rekha Pande
Professor of History, SOSS and
Head, Centre for Women's Studies
University of Hyderabad
Andhra Pradesh

Prof. Karuna Chanana (Retired)
Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational
Studies, School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Dr. Nita Mathur
Associate Professor
Faculty of Sociology
SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. C.J. Sonowal
Centre for Study of Social Exclusion &
Inclusive Policies
School of Social Sciences
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Faculty of Anthropology SOSS, IGNOU

Dr. Rashmi Sinha, Reader
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Mitoo Das
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Rukshana Zaman
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. P. Venkatramana
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. K. Anil Kumar
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Academic assistance provided by Dr. N.K. Mungreiphy, Research Associate (DBT) for the Expert Committee Meeting.

Programme Coordinator: Dr. Rashmi Sinha, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Course Coordinator: Dr. Mitoo Das, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Content Editor

Prof. Subhadra Channa
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi, Delhi

Blocks Preparation Team

Block Introduction

Prof. Subhadra Channa
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi, Delhi

Unit Writers

Dr. Ajailiu Niumai, Associate Professor (Unit 1)
Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive
Policy, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

Dr. Prashant Khattri, Assistant Professor (Unit 2)
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi
Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

Dr. Prashant Khattri, Assistant Professor (Unit 3)
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi
Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

Authors are responsible for the academic content of this course as far as the copyright issues are concerned.

Print Production

Mr. Manjit Singh
Section Officer (Pub.), SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Cover Design

Dr. Mitoo Das, Asstt. Professor
Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU

November, 2012

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2012

ISBN-978-81-266-6259-3

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Further information on Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi. New Delhi-110 068.

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by the Director, School of Social Sciences.

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :

BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION

Gender has been a much discussed and debated concept from the seventies onwards although the roots of the discourse were laid much earlier. The contribution of anthropologists towards gender as a theoretical construct was based largely on the huge amount of cross cultural material that is the sustaining data base of the discipline. From the material from various cultures and societies, anthropologists were able to take on a critical stand towards existing myths of gender construction and patriarchy such as the nature –culture debate, the concept of biological determinism and the public /private dichotomy, to name a few.

The interface of gender as an analytical tool with previously existing social and cultural parameters such as class, ethnicity, caste, sexuality, kinship and marriage (to name some) gave rise to a staggering amount of literature and research work. Some of these extended way beyond the limitations of gender to affect theory at the macro level, especially those that challenged the objective character of science and what was deemed a masculine methodology of assumed ‘objectivity’.

The introduction of gendered subjectivity into theory building challenged the very foundations of scientific methodology and the assumption of truth status for many so called ‘scientific’ facts, including Freudian psycho-analysis and many biological and anthropological assumptions.

Gender was seen as one of the prime yet cultural constructs that had a powerful effect on the organisation of social relationships; particularly manifested in the almost all pervasive existence of patriarchy. The assumption of a universal patriarchy gave rise to feminism as a theory and a movement but anthropology has constantly engaged in a troubled relationship with feminists theories often making seminal contributions of its own, based again on cross cultural perspectives. Anthropologists have shown that concepts formulated in a western context, often have different meanings and implications in different cultures, like patriarchy may operate at a completely different dimension than as understood in the west or the meaning of terms like public and private may differ as economies and societies are organised along completely different premises.

In the three units here you will learn about the theoretical premises of the construction of gender, reflected in how masculine and feminine are understood differently cross culturally and how such constructions may vary across both time and space. Gender constructions are informed through cosmological and other political and economic structures of society and consequently change as these social conditions change; gender is thus both dynamic and transformative in nature. You may also learn that not all societies confine gender to a dichotomy and there may be more than two genders (as in India). Patriarchy may manifest itself in various ways and kinship norms and values are both organised around and inform gender constructs. We find gender norms and stereotypes reflected almost every aspect of our daily lives and it is hoped that after reading these lessons the student will be able to understand that many, day- to- day myths and taken for granted aspects are nothing but constructs that are culturally constructed and socially transmitted.

UNIT 1 CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER

Contents

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Definition of Gender
- 1.3 Concept of Gender
- 1.4 Differences between Gender and Sex
- 1.5 Gender Ideology
- 1.6 Gender Stratification
- 1.7 Gender Identity
- 1.8 Gender Stereotype
- 1.9 Femininity and Masculinity: Meanings
- 1.10 Origin of the Terms Femininity and Masculinity
- 1.11 Dichotomy of Femininity and Masculinity
- 1.12 Relation, Significance and Contribution of Femininity and Masculinity on Religion, Sexuality and Culture in India
- 1.13 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the concept of gender and its varied ramifications from an anthropological perspective;
- comprehend the theoretical discourses on gender and understand about relationships within and across gender; and
- augment your perception on femininity and masculinity and its critical relations with culture, sexuality and religion.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The unit begins by exploring the definitions of gender and investigates the interface between the concepts of gender and sex. It highlights the matrix of relationship of gender with other related spheres like sex, identity, ideology, stratification, stereotype and the like. It also investigates the issues revolving around femininity and masculinity. The impact of the discourse of femininity and masculinity on religion, sexuality and culture are also discussed.

1.2 DEFINITION OF GENDER

According to Ann Oakley (1972: 18), Gender is a matter of culture; it refers to the societal classification into Masculine and Feminine. In other words, gender refers to a specific cultural meaning system that attaches to being a male or a female. Gender is a sexualised identity of individuals in relation to the customs, traditions, ways of life and the like. It is the social and cultural construction of roles, tasks, attitudes, values and qualities of males and females. The formation of gender differs from one culture to the other, as it is a culture specific aspect. The community or society as a whole contributes to the definition of gender. Often, our society influences us about the ways in which we expect males and females to behave and live in a certain way.

1.3 CONCEPT OF GENDER

Gender is a multifaceted reality that is culturally constructed and socially determined by the society. In other words, gender portrays culturally and socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women and men. Because these are socially constructed, they can change over time and differ from one place to another. Gender refers to behavioural differences between males and females that are culturally based and socially learned (Appelbaum & Chambliss, 1997:218).

Sometimes, gender is referred mistakenly only to women although it deals with the distinctive social construction of both men and women. The basic difference between men and women is the principle of biological reproduction in which this biological difference overshadows the other qualitative variations and achievements. Juliet C.W. Mitchel opined that the concept of gender was introduced in the early 1970s to distinguish the acquisition of social attributes from biological ones, for which 'sex' was reserved. In her view, gender is now an inclusive term that ultimately has come to include even biology. Mitchel believed that gender did not have a history or a psychology in which gender has come to replace women, as in 'Gender Studies' versus 'Women's Studies', at exactly that point where the intimate association between women and procreation is tending to wither away. She argued that to think of women is to think of women and children; to think of gender is to think of men and women but it is also to think of women and women or men and men.

Margaret Mead's (1935) study of the three societies in the New Guinea Islands, though contestable on several grounds, contributed significantly to the shaping of the concept of gender in the latter half of the 20th century. The functionalist notion of 'sex-role' was also a crude precursor of the concept of gender. It suggested that men and women are socialised into sex-specific roles, namely 'instrumental' and 'expressive'. These roles were regarded as the basis of a complementary relation between men and women, which along with the sexual division of labour, contributed to a stable social order. Scholars have questioned the focus of this conceptualisation upon 'individual' men and women who are socialised into sex-specific roles. They suggest that gender is something more than roles performed by men and women just as economies are something more than jobs performed by individuals (Lorber 1984). Critics have also pointed out that socialisation is always a precarious achievement and that agency,

1.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDER AND SEX

Gender gives attention to the socially constructed characteristics of men and women. Gender is a social construct whereas sex is the biological make-up of male and female. Sex is what we are born with, and does not change over time, nor differs from place to place. According to Kendall (1998:68), sex is the biological difference between men and women. It's the first label we receive in life. In some cultures, gender deals with women's supposed vulnerability, their identity as the second sex or fairer sex and their need to be protected. The main gender difference is basically in the biological functions of reproduction. Barbara F. McManus (1997) also argued that Feminist scholars have been differentiating sex from gender and view the latter as a socially or culturally constructed category. She asserts that gender is learned and performed; it involves the myriad and often normative *meanings* given to sexual difference by various cultures. She opines that feminists may differ in the importance they assign to sex, which is a biologically based category, but the idea that gender norms can be changed is central to feminist theory. Although sex and gender systems differ cross-culturally, most known societies have used and still use sex and gender as a key structural principle organising their actual and conceptual worlds, usually to the disadvantage of women. Mc Manus has the same opinion with feminist scholars who argued that gender is a crucial category of analysis and that modes of knowledge, which do not take gender into account, are partial and incomplete.

The distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', which came to dominate theorisation in the sociology of gender in the 1970s, is premised upon the idea of universality of 'sex' and variability of 'gender'. Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972) made the sex-gender distinction very popular in sociology. For Oakley, sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible differences in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. The term 'sex' and 'gender' can be traced to Robert Stoler, an American Psychiatrist, who used them to deal with cases of individuals whose biological 'sex' did not match their 'gender'.

The prominent theorist of feminist anthropology, Henrietta Moore (1988) argued that there was nothing self-evident or determinant about gender, and that anthropology with its capacity to understand how differently cultures around the world conceive of gender and sex, it could not treat the idea of womanhood as straightforward and unproblematic. On the other hand, Simone De Beauvoir (2010: 21) states that males and females are two types of individuals who are differentiated within one species for the purposes of reproduction: they can be defined only correlatively. At the same time, Ariyabandu (2009) states that gender refers to the biological or sexual differences between men and women, which make substantial distinctions in how they behave, relate and respond to needs of the family, kinship, caste, community, society and the state. These factors are indications of gender differences and gender roles, which were facilitated by the process of socialisation, customs, norms, historical traditions and the government machinery.

Undoubtedly, the epistemology of sex needs to be briefly examined through Michel Foucault's philosophy. Foucault (1976) argued that the role of sex and sexual activity in the discourse of western society during the 17th century made a fundamental and radical change. His investigation of discourses on sex arrives as a consequence to the commonly held conviction that there was a gigantic repression of sex. Foucault raises questions on whether or not sexual repression is truly an established historical fact; whether prohibition, censorship, and denial are truly the forms through which power is exercised in a general way, if not in every society, and whether there really was a historical rupture between the age of repression and the critical analysis of repression. He pointed out that through the evolution of Christianity and its doctrine especially of making confessions regarding sexual sins, society was compelled to start on an elaborate and inexhaustible discourse on sex. Simone De Beauvoir (ibid) opined that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. Beauvoir clarifies that gender differences in society make men superior through their role as breadwinners.

The theoretical framework of gender needs to be drawn further from Margaret Mead and Simone De Beauvoir. Mead (1928), revealed how the behaviour of men and women differed from one culture to another and thereby challenged the notion that all gender differences were innate. On the other hand, Beauvoir (ibid) argued that the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple (man and woman) is a basic unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. The critical trait of woman is that, she is the 'other' in a totality of which the two components are essential to one another. Beauvoir argued that woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change gradually.

Even till today, although women's legal rights such as Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Domestic Violence Act 2005, Hindu Women's Right to inherit property and the like are legally recognised, a long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. Despite the Constitutional guarantees, Indian women do not enjoy absolute legal and equal rights with men. Our people uphold the gender biases and culture of patriarchy that are deeply entrenched in the society. In Beauvoir's view, both men and women can also be said to make up two castes from economic perspective; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. She asserted that in industry and politics, men have a great many more positions and they monopolise the most important posts. Today, women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, but it is still a world that belongs to men. To decline to be the 'other', to refuse to be a party to the deal – this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste.

Leela Dube (2001) deals with the intricacy of gender in her empirical study of the Gond tribal society in Southern Chhattisgarh during the 1950s. She pointed out that an encounter between an 'anthropologist as a woman' vis-à-vis 'society' appears to be a relationship that is determined by gender, with the understanding that flows from a sensitivity of understanding by the actors involved. Dube, being a woman anthropologist with a rich experience and having the same biological and cultural imperatives of marriage, family and childbirth that every

woman encounters in her life, was able to create a conducive rapport in which she interacted meaningfully with the Gond tribal women and understood about their struggles.

With regard to gender roles, Macionis (2002: 262) cited Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist who claimed that complementary gender roles between men and women promote the social integration of families and society as a whole. In other words, Parsons opined that gender forms a complementary set of roles that bond women and men into family units for carrying out various important tasks. Women take primary duty for managing the family and raising children whereas men join the family to the outside world through their participation in the labor force. Parsons argued that distinctive socialisation teaches both men and women about their suitable gender identity and skills. Boys were taught to be involved in the labour forces and also to be rational, self-assured and competitive. On the other hand, girls were taught to be absorbed in the process of child rearing, domestic chores and being sensitive. The processes of socialisation facilitate children to learn and internalise the norms and values of the family, community and society and learn to perform their respective roles. Both boys and girls were nurtured to become men and women through socialisation in child-rearing, family beliefs, education, various jobs or service and cultural practices. Gender role deals with different responsibilities and expectations that society defines and allocates to men and women. These are not necessarily determined by biological make-up and therefore can change with time and in different situations.

Gender involves the matrix of relationship between men and women, which can be changed from a patriarchal to an egalitarian one. Therefore, gender is a collective and societal formation, which is often stereotyped and can be altered while sex is perceived as unchangeable, as it is a natural institution in the past. However, with medical advancement, innovation and scientific technological revolution, sex can be altered in our contemporary society. The subject of 'sex-change' or 'sex-transplant' or 'trans-gender' has become a critical and sensational public discourse in India today.

Box 1

Trans-gender: Transgender is an individual who is often assigned a sex at birth, but who consider that he or she belong to the opposite sex and his/her natural given sexual characteristics is an imperfect description of himself/herself.

Here, we would provide a brief description about gender ideology and how it influences the process of gender stratification and gender identity. It will also examine the way in which gender stereotypes take place in the society.

1.5 GENDER IDEOLOGY

According to Andre Beteille (2000: 18), an ideology is that set of ideas and beliefs which seek to articulate the basic values of group of people – what they cherish for themselves and for others – to the distribution of power in society. An ideology is not a systematic theory, although it has systematic properties and it often strives to be a theory. It may or may not succeed in articulating basic values to the distribution of power, but such articulation is part of its purpose

and design. Greetein (1996b: 586) describes gender ideologies as how a person identifies herself and himself with regard to marital and family roles that are traditionally linked to gender. In other words, gender ideology may refer to the value of distinctive roles, rights and tasks for men and women in their respective society. Sometimes, it deals with the prevailing legitimate gender inequality based on caste, class, tribe and the like. In view of Andre Beteille's idea on ideology, it can be argued that gender ideology is also a part of beliefs that sustain gender stratification.

The noted feminist and anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1996) pointed out the intricacies of gender ideology in her work in Nepal among the Sherpas. She opined that in every society, women are viewed as closer to nature, whereas men are identified with culture, a prejudice that she blames for the universal second-class status of women. She also examined at men's obsession with female chastity, and their systematic control of women's social and sexual behavior in traditional societies. She maintains that this ideology was bound up with the emergence of patriarchal extended families, social hierarchies and the state.

1.6 GENDER STRATIFICATION

Russ Long (2012) opined that gender stratification, cuts across all aspects of social life, cuts across all social classes, and refers to men and women's unequal access to power, prestige, and property on the basis of their sex. To be more precise, through the process of socialisation, individuals encompass gender into their personalities or gender identities and gender roles. In the context of patriarchal Indian society, men are given more power and resources as compared to women. Therefore, gender becomes an important dimension of social stratification. With regard to resource distribution among the matrilineal society (a system in which descent is traced through the mother's line or maternal ancestor), an individual belongs to one's mother's lineage and the children or offspring would inherit immovable or moveable property and titles or surnames from their maternal lineage. In India, the Garo and Khasi tribes in Meghalaya, the Muslim tribe of Kalpeni in Lakshwadeep and the Nairs of Kerala are matrilineal societies, although the Nairs have gradually transformed themselves into patrilineal society at present. Here, gender is a crucial factor of social stratification even in matrilineal societies.

Gender stratification maybe analysed from a structural-functional paradigm. The structural functional paradigm is a theoretical framework that perceives society as a complex system whose parts work together to advance solidarity and stability. The major insight of the structural functional paradigm is that gender functions to organise social life as emphasised by sociologist Talcott Parsons. Macionis J. John (ibid: 332) argued that gender implies more than how people think and act. It is about social hierarchy. The reality of gender stratification can be seen first, in the world of work.

1.7 GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity is defined as an individual's perception of oneself as male or female or third gender and it also deals with how society views you. This concept is closely related to the concept of gender role that reflects gender identity. Madhu

Kishwar (1996) in her article, “Who Am I? Living Identities vs Acquired Ones,” argued that she became conscious of her identity as a woman only on those few occasions when she was discriminated against on account of her gender, for example, when facing sexual harassment or biasness in employment. Otherwise, her gender identity is only one of her multiple overlapping and crosscutting identities, which peacefully coexists with other identities. From a sociological perspective, gender identity involves all the meanings that are applied to oneself on the basis of one’s gender identification. In turn, these self-meanings are a source of motivation for gender-related behavior (Burke 1980).

Sometimes, gender identity is imposed on individuals by society. Gender identity is also self-identified, as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors; gender role, on the other hand, is manifested within society by observable factors such as behaviour and appearance. The formation of gender identity is a multifaceted process that commences with conception and it involves processes during gestation and even learning experiences after birth. In some societies, the traditional norms insist that every one be classified either as a man or a woman. When the gender identity of an individual makes her a woman although her genitals are male, she may experience what is known as ‘dysphoria’ that means a profound depression caused by experience of herself as a woman and her lack of phallus. Gender role is normally an external expression of gender identity. Majority of people believed that gender identity and gender role are in accord. Sometimes, cultural differences proliferate in the expression of one’s gender role, but in some other societies, such fine distinction is accepted since gender norms can play a part in describing gender identity.

Box 2

Gender Division of Labour: It is the consequence of how a particular society divides work among men and women according to what is considered appropriate to each gender.

1.8 GENDER STEREOTYPE

Gender stereotypes are one-sided and exaggerated images of men and women which are deployed repeatedly in everyday lives. Stereotyping is a process by which children are socialised into sex roles, and by which adults and children are denied opportunities for more individually varied development (Marshall 1994). Gender stereotype is the assignment of roles, tasks and responsibilities to a particular gender on the basis of preconceived prejudices. It is also the assumptions made about a particular gender that may be positive or negative. Often, we observe that gender stereotyping is based on past speculations although it may not be true. Gender stereotype barely convey truthful information about other people. Alternatively, gender stereotype is a basic overview about the gender characteristics, disparities and roles of individuals and groups. Whenever people apply gender assumptions to others, they are propagating gender stereotyping.

Gender stereotyping often reveals conventionally simplified visuals concerning the standard social roles of men and women. Some of the stereotypes of men and women are: ‘men are not sensitive’; ‘women are not great drivers’ and ‘women love nagging and gossiping’. Gender stereotypes are beliefs held about characteristics and activity-domains that are considered being appropriate for

men and women. The typical characteristics of traditional Indian women are submissiveness, piousness, obedience and passiveness. In other words, a traditional Indian woman's role is to be in charge of domestic chores like serving her husband, looking after her children, cooking and cleaning. Such women were appreciated as "virtuous ideal Indian women".

In India, our culture upholds that respectable women are sensitive, caring, dresses decently and speaks softly which are considered as core values to make women more feminine. On the other hand, power and authority are traits commonly held by Indian men. The men are perceived to dominate the activities related to economics. The economy mode largely determines the social position of men and women wherein men are the center of family and society, whereas women are a part of property of men. Such type of gender stereotype creates a negative impact on women's lives. Nevertheless, it is a fact that gender stereotypes are dynamic and not static. It is influenced by the ideology and economic situation of a particular era. Both men and women carry out their responsibilities according to the division of the innate characteristics of gender. Gender stereotypes are reflected in marriage, family and community.

Activity

What is gender inequality? Find out how does gender inequality come into play in educational institutions (in the classroom, selection of courses and administration)?

1.9 FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY: MEANINGS

Femininity is a quality of being feminine whereas masculinity is a manly characteristic that distinctively describes men and boys. The terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are gender categorisations whereas 'male' and 'female' are sex categorisations. Both femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social rather than the biological. Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke pointed out that societal members decide what being male or female means (e.g., dominant or passive, brave or emotional), and males will generally respond by defining themselves as masculine while females will generally define themselves as feminine. Because these are social definitions, however, it is possible for one to be female and see herself as masculine or male and see himself as feminine.

In India, the main driving forces of socialisation such as family, kinship, community, peer groups, schools, print and electronic media and the like strengthens the cultural definitions of what is feminine and masculine. Leela Dube (2001) made a distinction between the ideas of femininity from the concept of femininity that is a characteristic of women's identity at a structural level in which she saw it as a continuous process in women's lives. She argued that these processes have effect in the existing space between biological truth and kinship relationships. In her argument, women are perceived as upholders of kinship who also determine the relationships between genders. Dube focuses on the patrilineal, patrilocal descent pattern of the Gond tribe while studying their kinship structure that determines the rule of descent and the sharing of property and resources.

Margaret Mead was one of the first to empirically ground the distinction between the biological and social characteristics of men and women. She did this rather dramatically through her study of the conceptions of masculinity and femininity among the Arapesh, Mundugamor and Tchambuli, three non-western societies in the New Guinea Islands (Mead 1935). She found that, among the Arapesh, both males and females displayed a “feminine” temperament (passive, cooperative and expressive). Among the Mundugamor, both males and females displayed a “masculine” temperament (active, competitive and instrumental). And, among the Tchambuli, men and women displayed temperaments that were different from each other and opposite to the western pattern. In that society, men were emotional, and expressive while women were active and instrumental. Mead’s study caused people to rethink the character of femininity and masculinity. It becomes obvious that, different gender-related traits, temperaments, roles and identities could no longer be inextricably tied to biological sex. On the basis of this study, Mead argues that the western equation between masculinity and aggression on the one hand and femininity and nurturance on the other is but one among a number of possible permutations of characteristics which have no intrinsic relation with biological sex.

1.10 ORIGIN OF THE TERMS FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

Today, the psychoanalytical studies of gender identity have attempted to understand the origin and relationships of femininity and masculinity. The origin of the terms femininity and masculinity emerges after Sigmund Freud (1962) formulated his theory of sexuality based on the anatomy of men and women. Sigmund Freud showed interest in the discourse on femininity and masculinity during the late 1870s in which he attempted to examine this issue from the bisexual and psychosexual development perspectives. His works in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1962), and in his article, “Feminine Sexuality” (1931) espouse the idea of a bisexuality that involves, in every human being, a more or less harmonious synthesis of feminine and masculine characteristics. According to Freud, the antagonism of femininity and masculinity go before the other pairs of opposites like active and passive, phallic and castrated which pave the way for it. He also opined that femininity emerges after the reorganisation of the psyche at the time of puberty. The antagonism between femininity and masculinity tends to be hazed, in view of the fact that both sexes are amalgamated in the similar rejection of a femininity that is equated with being deprived of the phallus. He was not entirely at ease in his approach to the questions of feminine sexuality and bisexuality. His critics pointed out his limitations in this area, particularly with regard to his equation of femininity with passivity.

1.11 DICHOTOMY OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

The term dichotomy has become a critical query in contemporary epistemological debates. The meaning of dichotomy deals with ‘a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different’ (Oxford Dictionary online 2011); it can be perceived as dualism which categorises how we believe. A dichotomy presumes a belief in the reality of dual contradictory

principles in every aspect. In this method, dichotomy operates hierarchical intentions by defining what is normal and abnormal, what is evil and good, what is excluded and included. The dichotomy of femininity and masculinity becomes critical in contemporary society. In our everyday lives, people would expect us to act, behave and live according to our specific gender. Many people are not able to live up to standards that are set for women and men.

Often, parents in India would advice their children to behave according to their gender. For instance, girls are taught to be coy, sober, sensitive, soft-spoken and submissive whereas boys are encouraged to be aggressive, dominant and tough. Masculinity is manifested in being strong and tough whereas being weak and soft are associated with femininity. It is not possible to call these Indian cultural phenomena “natural”. From the moment a child is born in our family, questions would be raised whether the baby is a boy or a girl. And, the cultural expectations are formed around the children, based on gender. Conscious and unconscious motives of having the family legacy continue through the boy bring delight. Toys like cars, lions, guns and elephants are bought for him preferably blue and never pink as it is categorised with masculinity. When a boy grows up, he would be taught to act brave, valiant and ‘not cry like a girl.’ He is trained to suppress his emotions as he is told it is ‘feminine’ to express it. He is encouraged to pursue sports, manage finance, drive, involve in decision-making but discouraged from domestic chores. He has fewer restrictions while going out owing to his masculinity, which also defines his primary role as breadwinner.

On the other hand, if a girl is delivered, her room is maybe decorated with the supposed feminine colour pink and dolls are purchased for her. The infants do not care concerning their identity being associated with colours. They are not even conscious of the significance of pink or blue colours which people link with femininity and masculinity. In India, a girl child is often considered inferior to a boy child. The thought of ‘giving her away’ and ‘saving for her dowry and marriage expenses’ may bring misery for her parents. She would be encouraged to learn cooking, dancing, singing, housekeeping and the like and she may have restrictions on going out. Her gender would define her role and function at home as sister, aunt, wife, mother and homemaker.

Activity

Are masculinity and femininity related to prejudice? If your answer is ‘yes’, to what kinds of prejudice are they related?

Box 4

Gender gap: Unfair differences in the situation or access to service of men and women. These may result from religious prejudices, traditional practices, social assumption, myths and taboos among others.

1.12 RELATION, SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY ON RELIGION, SEXUALITY AND CULTURE IN INDIA

Here the question arises as to how does religion affect femininity and masculinity? Why will religious beliefs, practices, or organisations reflect or deviate from dominant patterns of gender inequality? To what extent will religious influences affect gender inequality? It is evident that religion, culture and tradition in India are commonly used to justify women's inferior position in the society. The main religious texts have been interpreted to strengthen the power of men in our society. Gonsoulin (2005) asserts that women's usefulness have been defined from a male's perspective. This is explicitly witnessed in Hinduism. There is an intrinsic link of femininity and masculinity, in which the notion of Goddess as 'Devi' represents the female characteristic of the divine being among the Hindus. The concept of 'Shakti' (power) symbolises the divine feminine creative power and also signifies the sacred force that moves through the entire cosmos and the agent of change. 'Shakti' indicates the feminine counterpart without whom the masculine characteristic, which represents consciousness or discrimination, remains powerless and negated. 'Shakti' is also known as 'Prakriti' being the feminine manifestation of Brahma who is the supreme God of wisdom by which the universe exists and functions. The comprehensive force known as 'Yoni' in Hinduism is feminine in nature with motivation being the life force of creation. Indisputably, Hinduism celebrates femininity and masculinity in distinctive dimensions.

Traditionally, the subject matter of sexuality is a taboo in the public domain. However, it is remarkable to mention that the ancient Hindu sculptures and idols positioned in various temples across the country, including the historic Ajanta and Ellora caves reveals the sexuality, femininity and masculinity associated with gods, goddesses and religion. The specific carvings and wide-ranging designs covering several temples show deities in almost every sexual position that you can imagine. Such portrayals of sexuality may be appalling for some people but if we understand Hinduism, the display illustrates an Indian conventional way of thinking about sexuality. In our country, gods and goddesses have always been seen to embrace diverse kinds of sexuality, and the physical connection between two beings is perceived as a means to attain spirituality - 'nirvana'. The center of attention in Hinduism is not on whether the sexual participants are biologically the same or different to each other. Interestingly, trans-gendered gods can be traced in Hinduism too. It becomes clear that gender is socially constructed, and that sexualities have been displayed in India through its religion for many centuries.

The division between femininity and masculinity represents the Indian traditional model, where differences between genders are often exaggerated. Both genders (men and women) are biologically determined and unchangeable wherein they are distinct, with separate spheres of influence and qualities. Hence, the discourse on transgender, gays and lesbians are not accepted at ease in India. At the same time, masculinity is more highly valued in our culture and it is expressed through certain characteristics like chivalry, power, courage, boldness, achievement, invention and poise, which are perceived as being inherent to them. These qualities

have been acknowledged as masculine in biological as well as physiological aspects. It is perceived that the contributions of femininity and masculinity are different but it should be valued in the same way.

It is important to point out that; the Hindu masculine cultural values refer to the spirit of struggle, wealth, competition, goal, power and authority. Intriguingly, the feminine cultures give emphasis to additional value on relationships between people and attributes of life. On the other hand, the masculine cultures highlights the differences between gender roles which are more dramatic as compared with the feminine cultures wherein men and women possess similar values emphasising compassion and humility. It allows us to reflect and perceive new ideas of gender, sexuality and religion. India stands for unity in diversity wherein every ethnic group and caste is different from each other, but we tend to believe that deep inside all people are the same especially when the question of sexuality arises. In the sense, we tend to minimise cultural differences with regard to sexuality. In order to be able to understand and gain esteem with regard to cross-cultural relationships between different castes, class, ethnic groups, tribes and communities, we need to create massive awareness of the diverse cultural differences.

1.13 SUMMARY

Femininity and masculinity have been the central representation for understanding gender. Femininity and masculinity signifies the social outcomes of being female or male and their respective characteristics. Some feminists assert that biological differences get heightened through social descriptions of femininity and masculinity. As Judith Butler opined, any theorisation about gender introduces the idea of performance of gender in terms of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, performance of gender becomes instinctive as gender gets internalised through the socialisation process within the dominant discourses of patriarchy. Gender is performed at different levels within the family, kinship, class, tribe and caste. We socially enter into our gendered categories of femininity and masculinity from the day we are born. Today, social categorisation of femininity and masculinity are blurring. There is a constant shift in the conceptualisation of men and women as controlled by complete biological or social forces.

References

- Ariyabandu, Madhavi Malalgoda. 2009. "Sex, Gender and Gender Relations in Disasters". Enarson, Elaine and Chakrabarti, Dhar, P.G (eds), *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives*. New Delhi:Sage Publications.
- Applebaum, Richard. P and William J. Chablis. 1977. *Sociology: A Brief Introduction*. New York: Orient Longman.
- Beauvoir, De, Simone. 2010. *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage Books.
- Beteille, Andre. 2000. *Antinomies of Society – Essays on Ideologies & Institutions*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York and London: Routledge.

Burke, Peter J. 1980. "The Self: Measurement Implications from a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective". *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43: 18-29.

Dube, Leela. 2001. *Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*. London: Penguin Books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1931. "Feminine Sexuality". *SE*, 21: 221-243

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans, James Strachey. New York: Basic Books.

Gonsoulin Margaret. 2005. "Women's Rights and Women's Rites: Religion at the Historical Root of Gender Stratification". *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. Source: http://www.sociology.org/content/2005/tier1/religion_gender.pdf

Greetein, T.N. 1996. "Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labor: Interactive Effects of Wives' and Husbands' Gender Ideologies". *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58: 585 to 595.

Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke. "Femininity and Masculinity". Edgar F. Borgatta and Rhonda J. V. Montgomery (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Revised Edition. New York: Macmillan.

Macionis, J. John. 2002. *Society: The Basic*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Marshall, Gordon. 1994. *Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press.

Kendall, Lori. 1998. "Meaning and Identity in "Cyberspace": The Performance of Gender, Class and Race Online". *Symbolic Interaction*. Vol 2, Issue 2.

Kishwar, Madhu. 1996. "Who Am I ? Living Identities vs Acquired Ones," *Manushi*, 94, May-June.

McManus, F. Barbara. 1997. *Classics and Feminism: Gendering the Classics*. New York: Twayne.

Mead, Margaret. 1928. *The Coming Age in Samoa*. USA: William Morrow and Company.

Mead, Margaret. 1935. *Sex and Temperament: In Three Primitive Societies*. Chicago: Harper Perennial.

Moore, Henrietta L. 1988. *Feminism and Anthropology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Oakley, Ann. 1972. *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple Smith.

Ortner, Sherry. 1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. New York: Beacon Press.

Russ Long. 2012. *Introductory Sociology – Institutional Discrimination: Gendered Stratification*. Source: <http://dmc122011.delmar.edu/socsci/rlong/intro/gender.htm>

Suggested Reading

Beauvoir, De, Simone. 2010. *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans, James Strachey. New York: Basic Books.

Sample Questions

- 1) What do you mean by the term gender? Define and discuss.
- 2) What are the problems due to which there is gender inequality in Indian society?
- 3) How do we conceptualise and evaluate femininity and masculinity in others and ourselves?
- 4) How is gender related to culture?

UNIT 2 PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINANCE

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on the Origin of Patriarchy
- 2.3 Sexuality of Women and Male Dominance
- 2.4 Historical Perspective on Women's Productive and Reproductive Roles
- 2.5 Patrilocality, Matrilateral Kinship and Patriarchy
- 2.6 Marriage Pattern and the Institutionalisation of Patriarchy and Male Dominance
- 2.7 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After having read this unit, you should be able to:

- define and understand patriarchy and male dominance;
- understand the origin of patriarchy;
- understand that how control over women's sexuality is a reflection of patriarchy;
- understand the dynamics and linkages between production, reproduction and patriarchy;
- locate patriarchy in an anthropological, historical and archaeological perspective;
- understand the institutionalisation of patriarchy and male dominance through kinship, family and marriage patterns; and
- understand how caste and patriarchy are interlinked and how caste becomes an instrument of male dominance and patriarchy.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We are living in the so called modern or by some standards post-modern world, which is based upon the ideology of egalitarianism and universality but try and look around and you will find lots of examples that are contrary to the general conception about this 21st century. We are still carrying the burden of traditional divided society which was based primarily on ascribed statuses that ensured the place of a person in a particular community, caste or group by virtue of her birth in that particular group. Prejudice and discriminatory attitude is something that has not changed much over a period of time. This is true even in the case of

gender discrimination which is a manifestation of patriarchal mindset and ideology that stops short of calling this century a truly modern one. While penning down this unit, there is a debate going on in electronic and print media about the issue of male dominance and patriarchy. Cases in point are the recent molestation of a girl by a mob in Gwahati, Assam and pronouncement of patriarchal diktats by *khap* or caste *panchayats* in Uttar Pradesh. In Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh, a caste panchayat announced that the women of the village will not carry mobile phones with them and their movement in and around the village will be monitored and restricted. Similarly in Assam a girl was molested by a mob publically and in full view of the media. These incidents also highlighted the insensitivity and callous attitude of some agencies that were supposed to be the custodians of women rights. This brings us to the point where we should understand and rethink about how our society is structured in a manner that is biased towards the male members and overlook the rights and privileges of women (Rajalakshami, 2012).

Sometimes the state apparatus also behaves and is structured in such a way as to promote male dominance. One can look at the example of Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which was amended in 2005 but still contains provisions that are in favour of women's husband's family. This act relates with the succession of property. It is stated in the act that the self-acquired property of a women who dies without writing her will and in the absence of her husband and children will belong to her husband's family and not to her parents. This is a clear reflection of the societal and traditional norm where a woman after marriage is considered to be a member of her in-laws family and not to her natal family. Similarly in a marriage alliance a woman is not considered as an equal partner in marital property or husband's property acquired after marriage. This inequality devalues her contribution towards the marital property in terms of her labour that she provides under the rubrics of house-keeping and as a primary care giver to her children and husband (Singh, 2012; Rao 2008; Pal 2004). Beside these examples there are other more visible instances like sex-selective abortions that indicate towards a generalised discriminatory attitude towards women. These examples also reflect a patriarchal mind-set and male dominance. The next section will deal with the definition and theoretical perspectives on patriarchy and male dominance.

Activity

Make an inventory of similar issues that depict male dominance. Look around for such examples, read newspaper and magazines for such news that depict a power relation between male and female.

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORIGIN OF PATRIARCHY

Now one may wonder, how can we define patriarchy. It is a rather tricky question, as with other kinds of definitions related with social phenomenon and concepts, defining patriarchy in its entirety is not always possible. It is therefore better to understand the concept rather than getting into some watertight definition. However, patriarchy can be defined as "*a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women*" (Walby, 1990). This definition clearly outlines the nature of patriarchy which is engrained in our social structure that gives it a very fundamental character. Based on this social

structure, men dominate and exploit women and their action gets legitimised by the existing structure through institutions like family, kinship, marriage, religion, class, caste, race, etc. Patriarchy envisages within itself a form of power relation between men and women. In this relationship a hierarchy exists that places men in an advantageous position and this makes a complete recipe for female exploitation. In a more literal sense patriarchy (*pitrasatta* in Hindi) denotes rule of father in a male-dominated family. This rule emerges from an unequal resource distribution like land which is invariably inherited by the male line of descent. This control over the resources later gets translated into control over the production and reproduction of women. However later in this unit we will also see that how matrilineal and bilateral kinship structures alter this power relation in family and outside.

Feminism as an ideology has always tried to deal with the question and conception of patriarchy. There are different philosophical traditions in feminism that conceptualise patriarchy differently. Prominent among them are: Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Radical Feminism. Liberal Feminism is based on the philosophy of individual rights. The birth of Liberal Feminism dates back to the 18th century when it was realised that women should no longer be subjugated to the authority of males. It was in this context that liberal feminists challenged the customary and legal framework that reflected a biased understanding of women based on their inferior physical and intellectual capabilities which were used as instruments to subjugate and subordinate women. It is with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft that one traces the birth of Liberal Feminism as a separate feminist movement. In her magna carta- “A Vindication of the Rights of Women”, Wollstonecraft advocates for equal opportunity for both men and women. She emphasises that it is imperative that women are educated and made aware of their political and social rights in order to claim equal status at par with men. In the 19th century John Stuart Mill emerged as the leading scholar of Liberal Feminism and advocated that women are required to participate equally and pro-actively in various societal affairs and hence strive for equality (Mill, 1869; Eisenstein, 1981). Liberal feminists advocated that women should not only be confined to the domestic domain and there should be equal opportunity for them to participate in the public and political spheres of life. According to them patriarchy has confined women to the four walls of the house and therefore they need to get liberated in order to come out of the clutches of patriarchy. Liberals attacked the myth that women, because of their feminine behaviour are not suited for outside world and therefore they seek refuge and security within the domestic sphere of life. However, Liberal Feminism is being criticised on the issue of being very individualistic and therefore totally overlooking the structural, societal and familial basis for male dominance and patriarchy. Liberal feminists do not take a critical view of family and are focused solely on capturing space and rights for individual women in the public domain. They are also being criticised for being elitists since most of the rights gathered in this manner will be availed by the so-called upper class/caste women. Therefore this stream of feminism did not voice the concern of other differentially suppressed women on the basis either of class, caste, race etc. Again, on the issue of origin of male dominance and patriarchy liberal feminists are found wanting. They do not provide with a theory that can explain the circumstances that led to patriarchal set-up and male dominance in society.

This gap was however filled by Marxist Feminism that deals with the issue of origin of patriarchy and male dominance. Marxist feminists are of the view that patriarchy originated with the origin of private property (Engels, 1948). It is with the emergence of private ownership of property and its transfer through the male line of descent that patriarchy as a social structure was born. They also relate the concept of patriarchy with the capitalist mode of production. However they have been criticised for just adding the issue of gender to their already existing framework of class oppression. They are also silent on the issue of women oppression before the advent of private property. There are empirical evidences that point to the fact that women oppression and male dominance was present even before the advent of private property. Claude Levi-Strauss observed that the exchange of women is the basic form of exchange and it took place because of some taboo on incestuous relationships (sexual relations between close relatives like father and daughter, brother and sister, mother and son etc.) in each and every society. This kind of taboo required that women be acquired from a group outside one's own and thus clan, lineage, village exogamy originated. This gave rise to the manipulation of female sexuality and hence the emergence of male dominance.

Another group of feminist scholars known as radical and revolutionary feminists tried to understand and explain the origin of patriarchy and male dominance through the notion of female sexuality and its manipulation by the male. They are of the view that biologically women are different from men. This is the basic fact recognised by this brand of feminism. This biological difference defines the role of women as child bearers. This biological role is however translated and interpreted as related to the notion of "motherhood" which defines the role of mother in terms of both child bearing and child rearing. They are of the view that biology alone is not responsible for such skewed power relations between male and female but their cultural interpretation is responsible for the same. 'Gendering of sex' takes place in the socio-cultural context. In other words the control of male over the reproductive capacity of female is the root cause of patriarchy. Sheila Jeffrey, one of the revolutionary feminist puts her point on the origin of patriarchy by saying that there are basically two systems of class that operate in a society- i) the class based on and originating from the relations of production and ii) the class that is based on and originates from the relation of reproduction. It is the second system of class that is responsible for women subordination and patriarchy. Similarly, Finella McKenzie argued that the first kind of division of labour was between men and women and it originated from women's reproductive capacity and men's greater strength. This made women dependent on men and thus gave rise to unequal power distribution. However she also writes that it is not only because of this differential reproductive capacity that subordinates women but this biological differentiation is turned into psychological dependency by men and the social structure as a whole. This stream of feminism is however criticised for being biological determinist and reductionist. It also does not provide any alternative to end patriarchy or improve the condition of women. They advocate that women should be made aware of this kind of subordination which in turn can help in improving their condition (Beechey 1979; Lewin 2006; James 2010; Ranade 2007).

2.3 SEXUALITY OF WOMEN AND MALE DOMINANCE

The male control over the sexuality of women is considered to be a manifestation of patriarchy. This control is exercised by the male within the structure of marriage, family and kinship. Especially in the patrilineal societies like ours in India the institutions of marriage, family and kinship becomes a site for reproducing the patriarchal structures. In a marital alliance a virgin bride is always desirable. Pre-marital sex is seen in terms of moral pollution which is more severe for the women than for the men. It is considered that through the sexual intercourse a woman gets internally polluted whereas a male only gets external pollution. Internal pollution is related to the pollution of the substance. The concept of substance holds a great importance in maintaining caste distances (Beteille, 1991; Dube, 2009). The caste hierarchies and distances are maintained through the concept of selective exchange of women to a certain caste or castes. In this way the sexuality of women gets connected with the larger social structure based on caste. Again the concept of hyper-gamy and hypo-gamy demonstrates a strict control over the female sexuality. Hyper-gamy to some extent is permitted where a man of higher caste can have union with a woman of lower caste but hypo-gamous unions are strictly prohibited. Even if a woman of higher caste gets entangled with a lower caste male, it can bring serious consequences to both the families. There are numerous such examples where honour killings took place in the name of such unaccepted marital or love unions. This exemplifies that the control over the sexuality of women becomes an instrument of reproducing caste hierarchies. This also exemplifies a kind of corporate control over the sexuality of women. In this kind of control female sexuality gets attached with the honour of an entire village, caste, community or family and any infringement over the same can bring a lot of dishonor to the entire group. This kind of corporate control over the sexuality of women is also demonstrated by anthropologists like D.N. Majumdar who in his monograph named 'The Himalyan Polyandry' on the people of Jaunsar Bawar region of Dehradun documented fraternal polyandrous marriage alliance between a bride and all the brothers of a particular household where the marriage gets solemnised. Here the main issue is related with the right of access to the female sexuality which by such alliances gets restricted to the family or household as a unit. There are other such studies that have documented the marriage alliance of a bride with several brothers. Other studies have also documented that there is an unwritten rule or an accepted practice where after the death of the husband, the widow has to marry her husband's brother. This can be analysed in the light of retaining the women and her children, if any, within the family or lineage so that the right over the father's property remains within the household or family. This indicates a strong feeling of ownership of women, her labour and reproductive power. The patriarchal mind-set is quite well observable in Hindu marriage rituals and relations between the bride and grooms family. A kind of power relations exist between the families of bride and groom. The exchange of gifts and dowry indicate this kind of unequal relationship. A bride is considered to be a financial liability and burden over the groom's family which must be compensated adequately in order to solemnise the marriage. This undermines the productive work which women generally perform within the household. Household chores are considered to be non consequential as their labour is considered to be non-productive and taken for

granted. Therefore women are rendered powerless both at the level of production and reproduction.

At the level of family, the sexuality of women is under the control of her brothers and father. Leela Dubey (2009) explains this with the help of a very general yet powerful observation that brothers in the context of South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are provided with the task of keeping an eye on the movement of their sisters. They have the responsibility of protecting their sisters. This kind of responsibility gives them the right to exercise power over the female and dictate their behaviors according to their own whims and fancies. There have been several incidents reported where the brothers killed their sisters who were found guilty of illicit love or wanting to marry against the wishes of their parents. Exemplifying cases from Andhra Pradesh, Dube states that brothers often scold their sisters if they found them standing at the doorstep during the evening as they consider it to be gesture adopted by the prostitutes in order to invite their customers. However Dube further compares the situation of control over female sexuality in patrilineal South Asia with that of matrilineal and bilateral South-East Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. She argues that the kinship system based on matrilineality and bilateral concept has greater tolerance and less control over the female sexuality. She argues that in countries like Malaysia where Islamic influence is seen, there are restrictions on sexual behaviour placed on women before marriage but such restrictions are also placed equally on the men. It is quite common in Indonesia for women to migrate for work to urban centers and leave their husband's behind to look after their land and children. In Thailand women take to the profession of prostitution to support their families but they do return to the 'mainstream' and get married after sometime. This cannot even be imagined in the context of South Asia. The basic idea that underlines this behavioral attitude pertains to the fact that men are not the users of women's sexuality (Dube, 1988; 2000; 2009).

Activity

Discuss on the issue of sexuality of women depicted in Indian Cinema and its impact on the larger society.

2.4 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLES

The relation of production and reproduction needs to be analysed historically in order to understand the consolidation of patriarchy. Uma Chakraborty in her essay on Brahminical patriarchy in early India tries to understand this relation of production and reproduction during historical periods. She has based her analysis largely on pre-historical, proto-historical and historical accounts and evidences that throw some light on the dimension of women's role both in production and reproduction. Her argument starts with the contention that in the hunting and food gathering stages women's role was not restricted only in terms of reproduction but they also played active role in food gathering and also sometimes in hunting which she argues is evident in cave paintings of Bhimbetka and other archaeological sites in central India. In many such paintings women are depicted wearing some sort of head gear (depicting power and authority) and are shown taking part during hunting activities. The reproductive role of women was also

considered important since they were considered as 'life givers' and thus having close association with the events of life and death. This belief places women in some sort of mystical and supernatural space which is in sync with the evidence found related with the cult of mother goddess. During the Indus Valley Civilisation the position of women and the emergence of patriarchy cannot be established based on the evidence since the in-situ evidence is not supported by written documents as they are not yet decisively deciphered. However, there are evidences of class formation which are depicted and present in the form of rural and urban centers, citadel, surplus grain stocks etc. Presence of female figurines, mother goddess icons and dancing girl statues can be seen as pointing towards the important role of women in relation to reproduction. But nothing can be said with conviction regarding the gender relations.

It was with the coming of the Aryans that the real consolidation of patriarchy and male dominance took place. It is intended in early Vedic literature that the Aryans had to fight with the indigenous people of the land and in this fight they conquered their cattle, land and women. This is the first ever historical evidence of women taken as captives by the Aryans. These women then were assigned different roles that related with serving the Aryan race and were also used as gift items thus depicting a control over their sexuality. Later-on various texts including the *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti* outlines the behaviour of women and laid down rules for controlling their productive and reproductive capacities. There are written evidences that are sufficient to show that the state also had some control over the reproductive powers and sexuality of women. In this context it was laid down that the king can punish a woman for her adulterous behavior. This state control was guided by the principal that the sexuality of women needs to be controlled and this controlling power lies mainly with the husband after the women is married and if the husband is not able to control her then the state can take action against such 'culprit'. This also had some effect on the role of production of women. With such strict control over her sexuality, she was now mainly confined to the domestic sphere of life. Here also the kind of importance that must be accorded to a women's productive role was absent (Chakravarti 1993).

2.5 PATRILOCALITY, MATRILATERAL KINSHIP AND PATRIARCHY

Kinship structures form an important part of social organisation. Kinship structure of a society decides and ensures the membership of people into various groups. Like in a patrilineal kinship structure a son remains a member of the family of orientation whereas the daughter has to leave her natal house and move to the family of her affinal kins after marriage. She becomes a member of her husband's patriline. It is through these membership rules that the society perpetuates itself within a definite structure. These kinship structures have special bearing on the perpetuation of patriarchal social structures. The rule of residence after marriage is an important reflection of the principles of kinship. Leela Dube has rightly underscored the relation between rules of residence and kinship principles when she says- "*Residence is a material as well as an ideological expression of principles of kinship*" (pp.- 93). In the patrilocal form of residence, a couple after marriage resides with the family of the groom. This kind of residential arrangement is found in large parts of India. It is based on the basic premise that the daughter is not a permanent member of her natal house and she has to move

out after marriage. This really has an important bearing on her productive and reproductive capacities and autonomy. It also influences the rules of inheritance and daughter's share in parental property. It is generally argued against the daughter's claim over her parental property that if she gets a share of the property then it will eventually belong to her husband and her in-laws. Also the notion of payment of dowry dilutes her claim over the property since it is believed that the dowry is in lieu of her share in the property. The idea of partilocality entails that a daughter has to sever all ties with her natal house upon marriage. Her in-laws house is generally a new place where she has limited access and control over productive resources. Her sexuality is also controlled by her husband and in-laws in the form of demands placed on her to give birth to a male child (Dube, 2009).

As in the case with patrilocality, Karin Kapadia in her study among the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins of Aruloor village in Tamil Nadu points towards the institution of matrilineal kinship and argues that with the changing socio-economic context matrilineal kinship is falling into disrepute and is replaced by patrilineal kinship and prevalence of dowry during marriage. This in turn perhaps leads to male dominance and lower status of women in the society. Kapadia explains that among the non-Brahmin caste of Aruloor village the matrilineal kin in the form of Mother's Brother (MB) and Mother's Brother's Son (MBS) holds immense importance in the life of women and her children. MyB (Mother's younger Brother) and MBS are considered as prospective grooms for a woman's daughter. MB is also obliged to give expensive gifts during the life cycle rituals of his sister's children. This ceremonial gift is known as '*sir*' which is considered to be a replacement for a woman's share in her parental property. Thus it is both obligatory and woman's share in true sense in contrast with the institution of dowry and *stridhan* practiced among the patrilineal groups. Among the Brahmins of Aruloor the patrilineal kins hold more importance since matrilineal kins do not provide prospective grooms for marriage. Women are married to complete strangers as compared to the MBS or MyB in case of non-Brahmins. This accounts for forming new relations among the in-laws as compared to more familiar relations in the latter case. However with the passage of time even among the non-Brahmins matrilineal kins are losing their importance and dowry is gaining grounds since a dowry marriage is considered as "*high-status marriage*" and thus people are *keen to make it a part of their symbolic capital* (pp-861). This has far-reaching implications for women subordination and male dominance in the society as the negotiation and practice of dowry makes bride's family subordinate to the groom's family (Kapadia, 1990;1993;1994). This metamorphosis from bride-price to dowry in marital alliances is also evident among the *Gonds* of Vidarbha in Maharashtra. The reason for such a transformation can be located in increased interaction of this tribal group with the larger society where dowry is the norm. It is a result of peer pressure and a fear of ridicule that is generated if things are not according to the wishes of dominant social groups in an area. This again bears certain consequences for female subjugation and subordination (Khattri et al., 2012).

2.6 MARRIAGE PATTERN AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINANCE

Patriarchy and male dominance as related twin concepts are reflected in the institution of marriage. Marriages in India are mostly solemnised in the form of some kind of arrangement between the bride givers and bride takers. In such arranged marriages the consent of the boy and girl are not that important as that of their household heads or patriarchs. This is also a reflection of patriarchal mind-set. Kate Millet in her work on *Sexual Politics* has tried to define patriarchy in two ways- i) male dominating female and ii) older males dominating younger male and female. Therefore the notion of arranged marriage is a conceptual outcome of the older males dominating younger male and females on the question of choosing their prospective brides and grooms. Dipankar Gupta while analysing the Hindu marriage pattern states that the notion of arranged marriage is still the norm in modern India whether in rural or urban settings. We are all aware of the consequences in the form of *khap* and caste *panchayat* diktats that a young couple has to face in the event of marrying by his or her own choice. Gupta further argues that such arranged marriages are based on the notion of inequality between the bride givers and bride takers. A kind of hierarchy is set based on the notion of male dominance which is evident in the form of bride takers having a superior status than the bride givers. This male dominance and inequality gets reflected in certain marriage ceremonies like *pao pooja* (worshipping the feet) of the groom which the father of the bride giver has to perform. This reflects a kind of ritual hierarchy.

The notion of male dominance also gets reflected through the *kanyadaan* (giving away the virgin girl to the groom's family in the form of a gift) complex. This is considered to be the gift of the highest order that cannot be matched by any other kind. This sets a hierarchical relationship between bride giver and bride taker. The two categories of bride givers and bride takers as outlined by Dipankar Gupta can also be understood in the form of institutionalisation of patriarchy and male dominance where not only the male that is dominating and having a superior status but the female of the bride takers side (especially the mother-in-law of the bride) becomes an agency of negotiating power in a household. This is an excellent example of how patriarchy and male dominance is so engrained in the social structure that it takes different forms to get manifested through power sharing on the issues of production and reproduction. The very process of giving birth to a male child places the woman on the bride takers side. This is also the reason that even women long for a male child. The control of mother-in-law over the bride's household activities is a clear manifestation of her acquired status of a bride taker (Gupta 2001).

2.7 SUMMARY

It is now important to have a panoramic view of the twin concepts of patriarchy and male dominance. To start with, this unit dealt with the present issue of the kind of treatment that is given to women in our society. The unit opens with a debate on the position of women in terms of their rights and privileges. Recent examples of molestation and property inheritance rules became the backdrop

through which patriarchal structure can be understood. We also discussed that how state acts as an extension of the general patriarchal mind-set in the form of property inheritance rules and acts that are to some extent skewed towards male members of the society.

The next section of this unit tried to explain how patriarchy as a social organisation principle emerged at the first place. This question has been answered by different schools of feminist thought. Liberal feminists focused more on the issue of individual rights of female and are of the view that women can only be liberated from the clutches of patriarchy through the process of individual participation in the public and political domain. However this view has been criticised on the grounds that it does not explain the origin of patriarchy and is individual centric thus neglecting the structural design of patriarchy. The shortcomings of Liberal Feminism are taken care of by the Marxist feminist thought. According to the Marxist Feminism the world historic defeat of women began with the advent of private property. Marxists focused more on the issue of relations of production and how women are placed within this structure. However they are criticised for just adding women to their already existing theory of class struggle and have nothing new to offer in terms of the establishment of patriarchy. They are also criticised on the ground that patriarchy and male dominance was present even before the advent of private property and it is the basic nature of women being considered as a basic form of exchange that gave birth to the control of their productive and reproductive capacities. The control over the sexuality of women formed the basis for the radical and revolutionary feminist scholars. They are of the view that it is the psychological and social meaning that is accorded to the notion of motherhood that brought about the control over the female sexuality. It is the social extension of the role of motherhood to child rearing brought about their confinement to the four walls of the house and thus control over their productive and reproductive capacities.

Then we moved on to understand that how in the context of India, patriarchy became established. In this section we started with the example and evidence from the hunting-gathering stage and moved on to the Vedic and post-Vedic period where state also became an instrument for upholding patriarchy and male dominance. Further we understood that how kinship structures in the form of patrilocality and the Hindu marriage patterns have in-built patriarchal structures. This has been explained with the help of certain examples. In a nut-shell it can be said that one has to be very observant in order to decipher more such models based on patriarchy and male dominance.

References

Beechey, V. 1979. On Patriarchy. *Feminist Review*. No.3. pp- 66-82.

Beteille, A. 1991. *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective*. London: Athlone.

Birx, H. James. 2010. *21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook*. New Delhi: Sage.

Chakravarti, U. 1993. "Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Volume 28. No. 14. Pp- 579-585.

Dube, L. 1988. "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls In Patrilineal India". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 23. No.18. pp WS11-WS19.

Dube, L. 2000. "Doing Kinship and Gender: An Autobiographical Account". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 35. No. 46. Pp 4037-4047.

Dube, L. 2009. *Women and Kinship: Perspectives Of Gender In South and South-East Asia*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications

Eisenstein, Zillah. 1981. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman.

Engels, F. 1948. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Gupta, D. 2001. *Mistaken Modernity: India Between Worlds*. India: Haper Collins.

Kapadia, K. 1990. *Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of London.

Kapadia, K. 1993. "Marrying Money: Changing Preference and Practice in Tamil Marriage". *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. NS 27:1. Pp-25-51.

Kapadia, K. 1994. "Bonded by Blood: Matrilateral Kin in Tamil Kinship". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Volume 29. No.15. pp- 855-861.

Khattari, P., Mollick F. and Mukherjee B.M. 2012. *Changing Gond Identity: A Study Among the Gonds of Wardha District of Maharashtra*. Unpublished Manuscript.

Lewin, Ellen (ed.). 2006. *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. U.K: Blackwell.

Pal M. 2004. "Caste and Patriarchy in Panchayats". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Volume 39. No.32. pp- 3581-3583.

Rajalakshmi, T.K. 2012. "The Lesser Half". *Frontline*. Volume 29. Issue 15 (Jul 28- Aug 10).

Ranade, S. 2007. "The Way She Moves: Mapping the Everyday Production of Gender Space". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 42. No.17. pp 1519-1526.

Rao, N. 2008. *Good Women do not Inherit Land: Politics of Land and Gender and in India*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan.

Singh, K. 2012. "Man's World Legally". *Frontline*. Volume 29. Issue 15 (Jul 28-Aug 10).

Stuart, Mill J. 1869. *The Subjection of Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sylvia, W. 1990. *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Black Well..

Suggested Reading

Dube, L. 2009. *Women And Kinship: Perspectives Of Gender In South and South-East Asia*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Lewin, Ellen (ed.). 2006. *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. U.K: Blackwell.

Leacock, E.B. 1981. *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Rao, N. 2008. *Good Women do not Inherit Land: Politics of Land and Gender and in India*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.

Agarwal, B. 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Sylvia, W. 1990. *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Black Well.

Sample Questions

- 1) What do you understand by the term patriarchy?
- 2) What are the various theories of the origin of patriarchy?
- 3) How are women's productive and reproductive roles and capacities linked to the notion of male dominance and patriarchy?
- 4) How in Indian context is patriarchy consolidated historically?
- 5) How are kinship and marriage patterns linked with the notion of patriarchy and male dominance?

UNIT 3 DISCRIMINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Paradox
- 3.3 Universality of Discrimination and Subordination
 - 3.3.1 Status of Women in Tribal Societies
 - 3.3.2 The Case of Matrilineal Nayers
- 3.4 The Construction of Gender in the Cultural Context
 - 3.4.1 The Objective Reality and Subjective Experience
- 3.5 Gender Subordination and Vulnerability in Emergency Situations: New Frontiers in Anthropological Research
- 3.6 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After having read this unit, you should be able to:

- define gender discrimination and subordination;
- understand the gender related paradox in Indian society;
- answer the question on universality of gender discrimination and subordination;
- understand, how gender roles are shaped in the society;
- appreciate the importance of gender equality; and
- understand the consequences of gender based discrimination.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before moving on to understand the nature of discrimination and subordination in the context of gender, we should first look into the meaning of these two terms and also how they are linked together at literal and analytical levels. As per the Oxford dictionary, meaning of the term discrimination implies “*the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex*”. However in the Indian context we may also include caste in the above mentioned categories. If we deconstruct the above meaning for better understanding of the term then we may find certain key terms that are present in the meaning or which are otherwise implied implicitly. The English word ‘discrimination’ is made up of a battery of terms that together convey certain meaning. To begin with, discrimination is a prejudicial treatment which implies that it entails certain behavioural patterns that may be labeled as prejudicial towards a defined category or group of people. Now, one may ask this question

that how these prejudices develop at the first place? The answer to this question is engrained in the social structure of any society. These structures which are otherwise non-visible to a naïve eye can be detected and understood by anthropologists, who have always tried to understand basic structure of a society and how these structures get translated into behavioural patterns. For example caste is a reality in Indian context which formed the basis for division of labour and in turn gave rise to a bitter form of discriminatory behavioural attitude towards people labeled as lower caste. Such discriminatory attitudes are also patronised by religious texts and treaties. Similarly in the case of gender, prejudicial treatment stems from some more basic structural patterns that are passed on from one generation to other through the process of socialisation.

However the term discrimination cannot be seen in isolation from the term subordination. These two terms are complementary to each other. Subordination implies the “*action of subordinating*” or creating a hierarchy or strata. It can be argued that subordination validates discrimination. Therefore subordination becomes a tool or an ideological basis for discrimination. Gender discrimination in particular stems from the ideology that women are subordinate to men and therefore are not entitled for equal treatment in various walks of life. These flawed ideologies are also corroborated and integrated with people’s faith and values and therefore become well established at the structural and functional levels. The entire ideology of patriarchy is the result of such assumptions (Dube, 2009).

Discrimination and subordination should be juxtaposed with the ideology of equality to understand the meaning enshrined in these words. The Indian constitution is based on the notion that every citizen will have the right to equality and there shall be no discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex, race and place of birth. The preamble of the constitution states that equality of status and opportunity should be secured for all the citizens of India. It is in this background that we should try and understand that instead of state apparatuses designed to secure equality we still come across discrimination and subordination at various places and situations. This points towards a reality that there is a difference between the intention and practice of equality. The codified law is unable to alter the discriminatory attitude of people against specific groups of society. This in turn should be a ground for getting answers to such intriguing questions of gender inequality and discrimination. One needs to look deeper into the social structure and function in order to understand such gender based discrimination and subordination.

3.2 THE PARADOX

We are well aware of the fact that historically women have been agents of change in every sphere of life. How can we forget the contribution of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi and her close aide Jhalkaari Bai who fought bravely against the mighty forces of the British empire in the first ever battle for Indian independence. Our history is full with such stories of bravery and the industrious nature of women. Even in the contemporary society women are making their mark and presence felt in the political-economy of India. But still one can factually argue that women are being treated as subordinates to the male members and are discriminated against. This assertion gets reflected objectively in the skewed sex ratio which is

in favour of the male child. Cases of female foeticide from across the length and breadth of the country conveys that society has used it as a mechanism for socially selecting the male child over the female. Dowry deaths, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, etc are just few visible examples of the kind of treatment that is being given to the women in our society. There are many other covert situations that are not quite visible but contribute towards gender discrimination and subordination. One such example is the gendered analysis of the use of public space. We would not generally think that space has anything to do with the larger social structure, but the post-modern conception of space argues that the architectural design and public space is not gender neutral. Shilpa Ranade in her ovular article on the gendered conception of public space points towards the fact that the use of public space is largely limited to the male and women have to legitimise their behaviour in order to use that public space. She writes that “*women can access public space legitimately only when they can manufacture a sense of purpose for being there* (Ranade, 2007; pp. 1521).” She further argues that the gendered use of space becomes an instrument and an agent of reproducing gender inequality and power relations that exist in the society. This is an excellent example of how the use of space negotiates power and authority in the society. “*The control of women’s movement has been central to the maintenance of a gender regime informed by patriarchy. So long as women reproduce the discourse of the hegemonic gender regime appropriately through their socio-spatial performance of femininity in public space, they can largely access it safely* (Ranade, 2007; pp. 1525).”

Activity

Observe the public places and find out how it is being differentially used by males and females.

Gender discrimination also gets reflected in the form of women health and child malnutrition. It has been scientifically established that weight of a new born baby is directly related with the nutritional condition and health status of the mother. Especially India, Pakistan and Bangladesh accounts for holding almost half of the population of malnourished children in the world. This is linked to the poor health conditions and nutritional status of mothers in these countries (Mehrotra, 2006). Thus child malnutrition and gender discrimination are linked together. It has been observed that women are considered to be the primary care givers in a family set-up. Normally the household workload exceeds the caloric intake. It is also a normal practice in the patriarchal household set-up that women eat at last after feeding their children and husband which accounts for improper food management which works as a hindrance for better nutrition.

These examples and the paradox observed in the behavior lead us understand and ask certain basic questions regarding gender discrimination and subordination. One might ask that is the gender discrimination a universal phenomenon or is restricted to only few societies? A similar question that can logically follow the above one can be related with the origin of such discriminations and subordinations.

3.3 UNIVERSALITY OF DISCRIMINATION AND SUBORDINATION

The discipline of anthropology, since its inception, has been concerned with the dichotomy of local and global, idiographic and nomothetic, and universal and particular. This dichotomy in the beginning helped in explaining the evolution of society by locating the particular against the notion of universal. To some extent, any discipline that claims to be scientific in outlook must possess a universal, generalising character that can be law generating. In this respect anthropologists have always advocated micro-level studies with macro-level implications, which in turn helps in locating cross-cultural studies in a broader theoretical framework. The notion of gender discrimination and its universality also reflects the basic tension of the discipline.

Another dichotomy that helps in understanding the universal character of discrimination is that of public domain and domestic domain. It has been argued that patriarchal ideology has divided the entire world into two specific domains with specific roles, rules and regulations. The public domain is largely meant for the male members of the society where they can negotiate their roles and establish their supremacy over the 'second sex'. On the other hand domestic domain is largely restricted to the female where they work as primary care-givers. In the domestic domain however, women are not entitled to take decisions pertaining to family matters which is largely taken by the males (Purkayastha et al., 2003). This dichotomous view has been criticised sometimes for being 'western' in outlook. It is said that it originated in the western modernised world and has been generalised to other societies without taking into account the specificities in those societies. This calls for a revisit to the entire debate of public-domestic domain and take a re-look through the lens of idiographic, particularistic, contextual knowledge which has become a hallmark of anthropology since the advent of functional paradigm and re-instated in the post-modern ideology, though not entirely but partially. Karen Brodtkin Sacks breaks the monotony of universality by exemplifying the Iroquois society where the dichotomy of domestic-public is not found and women enjoy an enormous amount of decision making power in domestic, political, religious and economic spheres of life (Sacks, 1970). Similarly, Leacock has shown that among the matrilineal Native North-American Montagnais-Naskapi the division of labour between male and female members of the society is such that women are not dependent on their husbands (Leacock, 1981). Their economy is based on reciprocal division of labour between the sexes. In such societies there is no hierarchical division between the public sphere and domestic sphere, both the sexes produced goods that are necessary for livelihood. The above mentioned examples and many other similar cases reported by different scholars have revealed that there are societies where social relations are based on the principle of egalitarianism and men and women are placed equally in terms of their contribution to the society. However, even such cases do not account for superiority of women over men and the egalitarianism mentioned is only partial and not total.

3.3.1 Status of Women in Tribal Societies

It is a general conception that tribal societies are more egalitarian than the non-tribal societies or caste societies in the special context of India. It is a fact that tribal societies are not stratified on the basis of caste, but one might ask, that,

what is the position of women in such societies and how is it different from other non-tribal societies? The answers to such questions are rather tricky and by no means straight forward. Considering the ethnic diversity in India, tribe is not a homogenous category rather it is heterogeneous based on language, geographical area, physical features, social organisation etc. This heterogeneity stops us from giving a sweeping answer about the position of women in these societies. If one wants to understand the position of women in these societies then one must understand that how work is divided between the sexes, who owns that work and to what extent it is considered important by the society. A sheer division of work between male and female members of the society does not mean that women will be treated unequally, but the importance that is accorded to that work is more suggestive. It has been argued that position of women in societies with different economic and social organisation is different. Those societies where hunting and food-gathering/shifting cultivation is the basic source of sustenance accord better status and autonomy to women since collecting forest produce is considered important for sustenance. Also women in such societies are more autonomous since they have control over some resources and its distribution. As societies progressed from hunting-gathering to settled agriculture status of women started deteriorating since the ownership of land and its transfer followed the principle of lineage and such lineages were dominated by males. As Engles has rightly pointed out that the 'world's historic defeat' of women at the hands of men began with the emergence of private property. In this context tribal societies must also be seen as societies in transition or transformation since they came in contact with the so-called 'outside' world. This has led to the emergence of the concept of private property instead of common property resources and dowry in place of bride-price which in-turn led to deteriorating women status (D.N., 1988).

Apart from the economic determinant of women's status in the society, the social structure and organisation in a tribal society provides more autonomy to the women. Some tribes in the central India had an institution of youth dormitory. It is known by different names in different tribes like it is called '*Dumkeria*' among the *Oraons*, '*Giti-Ora*' among the *Mundas* and *Ghotul* among the *Gonds*. Such youth dormitories functioned as institutions where boys and girls could mix freely. They were a part of their socialisation process where they learned their gender specific roles, duties and reciprocity in behaviour while dealing with the opposite sex. This also regulated the behaviour between men and women and generated a sense of unity among them in society. Free mixing of boys and girls before marriage was never seen as a taboo in these communities (Bodra, 2008).

Activity

Collect more such examples from societies around you and discuss with your friends.

Such autonomy is also visible among the Bhil tribes where the institution of marriage has certain provisions that accord for greater autonomy for girls and lesser restrictions and taboo. Bhils are famous for '*Bhagoria*' marriage where boys and girls elope together and when they return they are considered to be husband and wife after paying certain amount called '*dapa*' by grooms side to the bride's side¹. Such kinds of marriage largely take place during the festival of

¹ As per the primary data gathered during a fieldwork among the Bhils of Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh.

‘Holi’ (the festival of colors). Such festivals are marked with greater intermixing of young people who then chose their life partners. This should be compared with the autonomy and restrictions placed on the women in the larger society where arranged intra-caste marriages are the norm and any deviance from the norm is met with dire consequences in the form of honour killings.

Scholars have argued that tribal women also had certain rights over the land. The rights of unmarried daughters, wives and widows are clearly spelled out. These rights were largely of two types- a) in the form of having the right to manage a certain piece of land and b) in the form of having a claim or share in whatever the land produced. These kinds of rights gave some autonomy to women in terms of managing and accumulating resources. In this context, the position of widow in a tribal society is different from the one in Hindu society. In tribal society, a widow, continues to contribute both in field and forest and thus are able to generate independent income by selling forest produce or working on the field. This is in contrast to the traditional Hindu society where a widow is considered inauspicious and is barred from doing any work and mixing with the society at large. However, this situation has changed in the recent times and after several reforms in colonial and post-colonial era related to widow rights and obligations. With the advent of British rule, the position of tribal women and their rights in the landed property underwent a change which was a result of the British policy vis-à-vis land (Bodra, 2008).

The argument centering the subjugation and subordination of women also holds true in some of the matrilineal tribal societies. Although the position of women in matrilineal societies are much better than that of their patrilineal counterparts (Dubey, 2009) but the ideology of patriarchy and unequal power distribution is a reality that contradicts a very naïve understanding of matrilineal tribal societies. Tiplut Nongbri while discussing the transformation in gender relations in the context of Khasi women of Northeast India has highlighted the fact that position of women in these societies is comparatively better but they are still not free from subjugation and subordination. It is in the politico-jural domain that men assert their power which gives rise to a kind of political structure that excludes women. Men even use their position to generate a kind of ideology that is based on a hierarchical relationship between men and women. This kind of ideological churning is taking place with the help of state apparatuses that are being used to distort the matrilineal system. It has also being argued that traditionally women were not allowed to take part in the political domain of decision making (Nongbri, 2000). This is quite evident from the fact that women have been traditionally denied the membership of Khasi durbar (Agnihotri, 2012).

3.3.2 The Case of Matrilineal Nayars

Matriliny is also found among the Nayars of Kerala. Katherleen Gough and other scholars like C.J. Fuller have provided a detailed anthropological account of how matriliney is practiced and perpetuated among the Nayars (Schneider and Gough, 1961; Fuller, 1976; Gough, 1952). In this matrilineal organisation women were not dependent upon their husbands as they are the members of a matrilineal group known as *taravad*. A *taravad* consists of members belonging to the same matriline. The institution of marriage among the Nayars is characterised by *tali-ketu-kalyanam* and *sambandham* relationships. *Tali-ketu-kalyanam* is a ceremonial tali (gold neckless) tying ritual that marks the transition of a girl into

a ceremonial marital alliance with a male member of the *enangar* (linked lineage). After this ceremony the girl is permitted to have several sexual unions with the other male members of the *enangar* who were also considered as “visiting husbands”. Children born out of such *Sambandham* unions belonged to the mother’s *taravad*. Even the dissolution of *sambandham* relationship was easy and was not looked down upon. Widowhood was not considered inauspicious and divorce and remarriage can easily take place without any social stigma attached to it. However, this kind of unique kinship and marriage pattern was located parallel to the socio-cultural matrix of high caste patrilineal Hindus and people from other religions. People from such communities do not approve of these relations and kinship patterns as they use to look at the practice of *sambandham* with disdain and disapproval. Many Nayar men with western ideas and education were also skeptical about their institution. It is in this context that Saradamoni has tried to understand the changing position of women among the Nayars and the transformation of matriliney. She has argued that the Nayar men were made to feel inferior and uncivilised by people who look down upon the practice of “visiting husband”. This led Nayar men to bring about certain changes in their institution to make them coterminous with the ideology of the west and other patrilineal communities. This so-called western and progressive ideology is based on the principal that after marriage a woman and her children become the responsibility of her husband and the husband is obliged to look-after his family. This is different from the Nayar’s institution where the *taravad* is responsible for the maintenance of women and her children. From the perspective of women, such changes resulted into subordination and subjugation of women in the matrilineal institutional set-up of the Nayars (Saradamoni, 1999).

It has also been argued in the context of status of women that we should not always talk and analyse in terms of low or high status for women in a society. Thus a dichotomous understanding in this context is not called for. There are also intermediary statuses in various societies depending upon rights and privileges accorded to women. It is for sure that in most of the societies across the world, the status of women is not as good as that of men and specially in patriarchal societies it is even worse. Patriarchal societies impose certain restrictions and taboos that need to be followed by women in order to get the label of ‘good women’.

3.4 THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

This section will deal with the question that, how socialisation as a process is linked with gender based discrimination and subordination? When we say that something is engrained in our culture or society at the level of its basic structure, then we must also realise that this culture and structure gets reproduced over generation after generation. Changes in cultural traits and social structure do occur either from within the society or forced and adopted from outside. However for a very long period these changes co-exist with the older or traditional patterns and show a spatial difference in their manifestation. This is quite evident in the context of rural-urban patterns that reflect this kind of co-existence to some degree.

Socialisation is a process through which we learn our cultural values, traits, customs and rituals. We also learn behaviour patterns that are accepted and legitimised in the larger societal context. In this context gender specific roles are learned both at home and outside. This learning is largely observational in nature and both genders internalise the kind of behavior they receive which is later projected in their own behavior. Leela Dube, one of the pioneers in the field of gender studies had discussed about the construction and consolidation of gender identity. She is of the view that in a patriarchal, patrilineal society like ours in India, gender roles start taking shape very early in life. The difference in the enthusiasm of parents at the birth of male and female child is keenly observed by the female child and is internalised which becomes part of her psyche. Later in life she observes her mother, grandmother and other female members in the society and try to become like them in order to gain acceptance in the family and in society at large. The very notion of women being '*paraya dhan* (someone else's property)' that is largely held in our patriarchal society also contributes towards constructing the gender identity that leads to discrimination and subordination. A woman is never regarded as a permanent member of her natal family as she has to leave that family and move to her husband's house. This gives rise to the belief that she will never contribute to the family income and instead she will take away certain part of the family income as her dowry. In contrast a male child is considered to be the saviour of the family and as a permanent member of the family, one who will contribute towards the family income and take care of aging parents. Such expected roles and identity formation leads to a stratified system where gender is placed in a hierarchical pattern (Dube, 1988).

3.4.1 The Objective Reality and Subjective Experience

It is an objective reality that women are being discriminated against and treated as subordinates in the society. This fact gets reflected in the child sex ratio across the country of India. As per the census report of 2011 the child sex ratio in the age group of 0-6 years is just 914 girls per 1,000 boys. This is more alarming in the context of the decadal decline in this ratio which was 976 in 2001. Even in states like Maharashtra which are still considered as progressive and where other development indicators are better than many other states in India, the child sex ratio stands at a meager 883 girls per 1,000 boys. In 2001 this ratio was 913. To understand the meaning of this ratio better, it should be kept in mind that as per the global trends a normal child sex ratio should be above 950. Therefore, this is an objective indicator of gender discrimination and preferential sex selection in favor of male child (Katakam, 2012).

Now one may ask that how this discrimination is manifested in lived experience of women. Do women really feel that they are being discriminated? What difference do they observe in terms of their experience in the treatment that they receive from family members? Such questions became part of a study that tried to understand the subjective experience of women vis-à-vis discrimination. The basic premise behind this study was the fact that what we believe has occurred to us is more significant than what has actually happened. This premise works at a psychological level where our perception of reality is more significant than the reality itself. Therefore it is important to know that what women perceive has happened with them in terms of discrimination and subordination.

It has been found in the study that there is a gap between the objective reality and subjective experience of that reality. This study was conducted among the girls between the age of seven and eighteen. These girls belonged to six hundred rural and urban households in eight different states in India. When they were asked that is there any gender-based discrimination that they face, then the answer was mostly 'NO'. They did not report any difference between boys and girls with respect to health care and food either. No difference was reported in terms of rewards and punishments given to boys and girls. In the domain of education also more than seventy percent believed that education is equally important for both boys and girls.

One may wonder that instead of objective discrimination evident in the statistical data, the subjective experience is not in sync with it. Sudhir Kakar and Kathrina Kakar in their celebrated book *'The Indians: Portrait of a People'* gives a possible explanation for such a discrepancy. They are of the view that such discrimination is not directly transformed into behaviour and is filtered and diluted through the institution of family where a girl child finds herself in a situation where one or more adult member of the family is sympathetic and loving in their behaviour and attitude towards the girl. This is perceived and memorised as instances contrary to the patriarchal dominating and discriminatory values. Also, existence of a sphere of femininity and domesticity gives women an opportunity to be productive and lively. This sphere includes other women in the household and it is here that women negotiate meaning of discrimination and subordination and their reaction towards discrimination gets diluted. However, in folklores, ballads and wedding songs women do react against discrimination by portraying men as faithless (Kakar and Kakar, 2007).

3.5 GENDER SUBORDINATION AND VULNERABILITY IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS: NEW FRONTIERS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The discourse on gender discrimination and subordination has found some new grounds in the emerging sub-field of the 'Anthropology of Disasters'. This new area of research tries to understand that how gender subordination leads to increased vulnerabilities in emergency situations. Disasters are seen not only in terms of hazardous climatic and man-made situations but are also largely understood as socio-economic, cultural and political vulnerabilities that are in-built in the societal structure. This view gives rise to a new understanding and analysis of women and their status in society and how this affects their vulnerability during and after natural or man-made calamities.

A study was conducted by a group of anthropologists² in a flood affected district of Bahraich in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It was a case-control study where levels of anxiety, depression and stress was measured among the flood affected and

² This study was a part of the European Union 6th Framework MICRODIS Project entitled- "Integrated Health, Social and Economic Impacts of Extreme Events: Evidence, Methods and Tools". A group of Anthropologists headed by Prof. P.C. Joshi, Asia Co-ordinator of MICRODIS and Professor of Anthropology, University of Delhi conducted fieldwork in *Bahraich* district of Uttar Pradesh.

non-affected populations. It was found that in the flood affected zone the level of anxiety and, depression and stress was more among the females than in males. The underlying reason for such a disparity was found embedded in the relative status of women in the society. The patriarchal system has clearly laid down rules for women and is almost restricted to their domestic domain. The main task of a woman is to feed their children and take care of the household.

Looking from a feminist political ecological perspective, women are seen as primary resource users and managers, and in terms of the responsibilities they have towards the dependents in the household and community (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangarai, 1996). This argument finds basis in the light of data collected from FGDs (Focused Group Discussions) among the women of flood affected area. Jum explains (name of the participant): *“Men go out in order to feel some change but the mothers are the ones whom children want. As a man and a father, no one ever goes to the extent of seeking help at the cost of his self respect but women will not be able to withstand the hunger and plight of her children hence she would even beg for them in spite of being abused and ridiculed. Her only aim is to feed her children at the cost of her self esteem.”* To this Sama, another participant in the FGD further adds: *“There are times when the troubles of the women are more than that of men because men do not have to look after the basic needs of the children like where to feed them, what to feed them, where to make them sleep.”* This exemplifies that how women subordination increases their vulnerability in the context of disasters. This is another objective reality of gender based discrimination and subordination that has obvious consequences for the well-being of women in special circumstances and for the society at large (Khattri et al., 2012).

3.6 SUMMARY

Discrimination and subordination are linked concepts. These two terms are complementary to each other. Subordination implies the “*action of subordinating*” or creating a hierarchy or strata. It can be argued that subordination validates discrimination. Therefore subordination becomes a tool or an ideological basis for discrimination. The very process of primary and secondary socialisation in our society clearly demarcates gender specific roles and hence creates a divide between the public and domestic domains. These two domains need to mix together. Women are actively coming forward in the public domain and its time for men to move towards the domestic domain and do not consider it something exclusively for women. It is only with this kind of sharing that we can achieve the goal of gender equality.

Gender based discrimination is a universal phenomenon with some exceptions where the status of women is to some extent equal with that of men. In the case of tribal societies in India and elsewhere as we have seen in the examples above that women have greater autonomy in these societies. We should also try to learn from these examples.

Throughout this unit we have seen that gender discrimination and subordination are embedded at the socio-structural level. The idea of gender equality enshrined in our constitution has not been fully realised. Even today we hear news of gender based discrimination in the form of sex selective abortions, female infanticide, domestic violence, molestations, rape etc. As responsible citizens of this country

it is our duty to stop such discriminatory and criminal behaviour. The first step towards this goal is to realise and understand the kinds of discriminations that are prevalent in our society and then to act accordingly. The need of the hour is to discard the patriarchal mindset and start thinking in a rational and scientific manner.

References

- Agnihotri I. 2012. "Social Bondage". *Frontline*. Volume 29. Issue 15 (Jul 28-Aug 10)
- Bodra G. 2008. *Empowerment of Tribal Women*. New Delhi: Mohit Publications.
- Brodin Sacks K. 1970. "Social Basis of Sexual Equality: A Comparative View". R. Morgan (ed.). *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of writings from women's liberation movement*. New York: Random House.
- D.N. 1988. "Significance of Women's Position in Tribal Society". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 23. No.26. pp 1311-1312.
- Dube L. 1988. "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls In Patrilineal India". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 23. No.18. pp WS11-WS19.
- Dube L. 2000. "Doing Kinship and Gender: An Autobiographical Account". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 35. No. 46. Pp 4037-4047.
- Dubey L. 2009. *Women And Kinship: Perspectives Of Gender In South and South-East Asia*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Ellen Lewin (ed.). 2006. *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. UK: Blackwell.
- Fuller C.J. 1976. *The Nayars Today: Changing Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gough K. 1952. "The Nayar Taravad". *Journal of the Maharaja Sayajirao (University of Baroda, India)*. 1(2): 1-13
- James Birx H. 2010. *21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Kakar S. and Kakar K. 2007. *The Indians: Portrait of a People*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Katakam A. 2012. "The Unwanted Girl". *Frontline*. Vol 29. Issue 14. (July 14-27)
- Khatti P., 2011. *Social Impacts of Disaster: An Anthropological Perspective*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Department of Anthropology. University of Delhi.
- Khatti P., Joshi P.C., Wind T., Kompoe I.H. and Guha-Sapir D. 2012 (Jan-Jun). "Understanding Mental Health as a Function of Social Vulnerabilities in a Disaster Situation: Evidence from Recurrent Flooding in Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh". *Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India*. Volume 61. No.1. pp- 109-124

Leacock E.B. 1981. *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Mehrotra S. 2006. "Child Malnutrition and Gender Discrimination in South Asia". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 41. No.10. pp 912-918.

Nongbri T. 2000. "Khasi Women and Matriliney: Transformations in Gender Relations". *Gender Technology and Development*. Volume 4. No. 3. Pp- 359-395

Purkayastha B., Subramaniam M., Desai M., and Bose S. 2003. "The Study of Gender in India: A Partial Review". *Gender and Society*. Volume 17. No. 4. Pp- 503-524

Ranade S. 2007. "The Way She Moves: Mapping The Everyday Production of Gender Space". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol 42. No.17. pp 1519-1526.

Rocheleau D., B. Thomas-Slayter and E. Wangarai, ed. 1996. *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences*. New York: Routledge.

Saradamoni K. 1999. *Matriliney Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore*. New Delhi: Sage.

Schneider D.M. and Gough K. (eds.). 1961. *Matrilineal Kinship*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Suggested Reading

Ellen Lewin (ed.). 2006. *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. UK: Blackwell.

Kakar S. and Kakar K. 2007. *The Indians: Portrait of a People*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Leacock E.B. 1981. *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

James Birx H. 2010. *21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook*. New Delhi: Sage.

Sample Questions

- 1) What do you mean by discrimination and subordination?
- 2) How are discrimination and subordination linked together?
- 3) Are gender discrimination and subordination universal phenomena?
- 4) How is the process of socialisation linked to gender discrimination and subordination?
- 5) What are the consequences of gender discrimination and subordination?