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***For 6th sem. (Major), paper-6.4.***

Topic:

Concept of Gender

**Meaning:** Gender is socially constructed concept which creates differentiation between women and men in different areas such as work, roles and responsibilities and so on. Gender as stated by **FAO** as ‘the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’.

**Definitions** There is no specific definition of the term ‘Gender’. Following are few definitions of gender:

1. According to **Kamla Bhasin**, “gender refers to the sociocultural definition of men and women, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles”.
2. **Ann Oakley**, who was among the first few feminist scholars to use this concept, says the following, “Gender’ is a matter of culture, and it refers to the social classification of men and women into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine.”
3. **World Health Organization** defines gender, “the word gender is used to describe the characteristics, roles and responsibilities of women and men, boys and girls, which are socially constructed. Gender is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organized, not because of our biological differences”.
4. **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation** defines, “gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life”.

Thus, as we see from the above definitions that gender issues focus on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour, interests and needs. Gender relations affect household security, family well-being, planning, production and many other aspects of life. Gender should not be misunderstood as being the promotion of women only.

**Characteristics**: The concept of gender contains the following important characteristics:

1. Gender is ordinarily prescribed by one’s culture. It is culturally constructed.
2. Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.
3. Gender is relational-gender roles and characteristics that do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another and through the relationships between women and men, girls and boys.
4. Gender is a socio-cultural expression of particular characteristics and roles that are associated with certain groups of people with reference to their sex and sexuality.
5. Gender identity is one's internal, personal sense of being a man or woman.
6. Gender can be understood by observing one’s social exchanges (i.e. the way he or she talks to others), family values, and peer influences that shape gender affiliation and gender identity.
7. Gender is socially determined like being masculine or feminine.

**Differences between Gender and Sex:**

Following are the points that would reveal the differences between sex and gender.

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| **Gender** | **Sex** |
| 1 | Gender is socio-cultural and it is man-made. | 1 | Sex is natural |
| 2 | Gender is socio-cultural and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behavior patterns, roles and responsibilities, etc. | 2 | Sex is biological. It refers to visible difference in genitalia and related differences in procreative function. |
| 3 | Gender is variable and changes from time to time, culture to culture, even family to family. | 3 | Sex is constant, it remains the same everywhere. |
| 4 | Gender can be changed through the process of gender socialization | 4 | Sex cannot be changed. |
| 5 | Gender refer to a person’s emotional identity which includes the norms of behavior of a person of that particular sex. | 5 | In sociological terms, the term sex refers to the physical identity of a person; either male or female according to genitals, |

The above mentioned points shows that sexuality is distinct from gender yet intimately linked to it. It is the social construction of a biological drive. Julie Greenberg writes that although gender and sex are separate concepts, they are interlinked in that gender discrimination often results from stereotypes based on what is expected of members of each sex. According to Simon de Beauvoir, “one is not born a women but becomes one.” The quotation underscores the basic distinction between sex and gender. It is both psychological and physiological aspects. In most societies biological differences are translated into socially institutionalized roles and position. Society takes up the task of converting a biological male into a man and a biological female into a women by prescribing masculine and feminine qualities to them respectively.

**Gender Socialization:** Socialization is a process of interaction through which the individual learns the habits, beliefs skills and standards of judgment that are necessary for effective participation in social groups and communication. Gender socialization refers to the ways in which society ensures that children learn the appropriate behaviors associated with their beings males or females. It also sets children into different courses in life because they are male or female. Society thus channelizes human behavior through gender socialization.

A child learns that there are not only biological differences between sexes, but also socially and culturally constructed differences between them. The sex of an individual is a biological construct and refers to male and female distinction between the human species. Gender, on the other hand, is a socially construct and designates masculinity and feminity, the social, psychological and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness.

Gender differentiation does not come naturally from biological differences. Individuals are converted from biological male and biological female into man and women respectively with the process of socialization. For every new born baby, the family members especially the parents influences and teach everything that is learnt in childhood. At birth, the colour pink is used for girls and blue for boys to differentiate between the sexes of the babies. Gender socialization thus starts with the birth of an infant. As infants grow up, their development pattern diverges on the basis of their sex. Family members, books, television, and schools teach reinforce gender-type expectation and influence the self-concepts of individual. Newborn girl babies are often described as ‘cute’, ‘tiny’, ‘soft’, and ‘delicate’, whereas boys are seen as ‘strong’, and ‘hardy’. In the process of growing up, children learn gender-stereotyped characteristics.

**Gender Discrimination and Gender Exclusion:** Though there is no consensus concerning the key dimensions of gender discrimination or inequality. Most scholars agree that it is a multi-dimensional concept composed by several spheres like economic, educational, political, legal, health and family systems. For present purposes, gender discrimination can be conceived of as a system that justifies and perpetuates the domination of women by men in all areas of private and public life. This structural system of domination has existed throughout history and has been labeled patriarchy. The most important conceptual point of gender inequality is grounded in by patriarchal structures and ideologies. Gender inequality has been a serious concern in the world and gender differences have some repercussion in relation this kind of discrimination between men and women on the basis of gender has been resulted from prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and traditions. This is generally known as gender exclusion. Gender discrimination creates gender exclusion and these differences create inequality. It means social disparity or disparity of distribution of opportunity.

**Different areas of gender exclusion:**

There are various aspects of gender exclusion and we can discuss these aspects basically in the following four areas:

(1) **In the family:** Women have been facing discrimination in different aspect within the family. Some of these aspects are-roles and responsibilities, decision making process, division of labour, health, food distribution, dress, education, ownership of property etc.

1. One of the important aspects where gender exclusion found is roles and responsibilities in the family. Men are considered to be the heads of the households, bread-winners, owners and manager of property, and active in politics, religion, business and the professions. Women on the other hand, are expected and trained to bear and look after children, to nurse the infirm and the old, do all households work and so on. This differentiation has made by the family through the socialization process.
2. Decision making process is another area where gender exclusion is prevalent in the family. We have seen that in the family decision are mostly taken by the male member because they earn money. Women are denied participation in the community decision, leaving with limited rights in the household.
3. Another area where gender discrimination is found is division of labour. The traditional way of thinking upholds the man as the ‘breadwinner’ and the women as the ‘bread maker’. As a result, women are mostly confined to home and busy with households activities which is regarded as unproductive activities.
4. Another area of gender exclusion within family is health. Health security is one of the important components of human development. Unfortunately, in most of the family we have seen that women health is not given more importance. As a result, they face various problems relating to health. Similarly, in case of food distribution also women face inequality within family.
5. Education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development in any society. It is well known fact that the development of future generation mainly depends upon the education of women section. But it is the common belief that the boy is the ancestor of the parents who can take care them in their old age and the girl child is married to another family.
6. Generally in the patriarchal society, women do not enjoy economic rights. As we have seen that women had to depend upon men- before marriage, women should be protected by their fathers, after marriage by their husbands and during old age by their sons. Therefore, women are deprived of their property rights.

(2) **In the** **Society:** In society gender discrimination takes place at all levels. Almost all the spaces gender discrimination is widespread such as taking traditional rules and regulation, religious institution, caste, class, ethnic groups and also in the educational institution. But it has to be mentioned here that all women are not subordinate to all men in society. For instance, a rich women because of her class affiliation, is in a position to dominate the men who work for her as domestic help. In this case a women class is more important. In other cases, a lower caste or class women are exploited by an upper caste men.

Besides, different religions also allows gender discrimination of women. For instance, Muslim personal law allows polygamy and unilateral divorce for men; Christian law does not recognize adultery by a man as cause for divorce; the Hindu code does not allow adoption of children by parents of two different religions and so on. And all religious laws favour men in matters relating to property rights and inheritance. It is to mention here that gender discrimination does not come naturally, it has been imposed in the name of traditional values, caste, and custom through socialization process.

(3) **In the** **politics:** Gender discrimination can also be seen on several aspects such as political participation, political representation, political decision making and suffrage and voting behaviors etc. Political power is the strongest weapon to empower women, but it is in the sector of politics that women all over the world are lagging behind men. This is due to the fact that the state machinery had been a creation of man and since its inception, women were kept outside it. Political participation depends on the political system.

(4**) In the economic field:** This is another important area of gender discrimination. In this areas gender discrimination is seen in different aspect such as works, jobs and position, in the market sector, income etc. It can be said that although women perform almost all the household labour and a considerable portion of socially productive labour yet, women’s labour contribution has not been recognized, nor has it been given due remuneration and respect. Women’s wages tend to be lower than wages for corresponding work by men. Much of women’s labour is none waged since it is categorized as household labour. Consequently, even if women’s share of work is larger, and this is true of most societies, their share of income is lower.

**Gender Justice:** The concept of gender justice emerged as a result of gender discrimination. The term gender justice is used interchangeably with other terms like women empowerment, gender equality, gender equity and even women’s right. Thus, gender justice is often used with reference to emancipator projects that helps in protecting women’s right through legal change, or promote women’s interest in the social and economic policy.

In other words, gender justice indicates that no one would be deprived of justice or discriminated on the basis of one’s gender. Gender justice is a correlation of socio-economic, political, cultural, educational and environmental factors. All these elements are to be ensured for achieving gender justice. Gender justice core of all social justice and involves measures for actions towards transforming society as a whole into just and equal.

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