

CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

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Gender is not innate or given rather it is constructed by human being (men). Society admonishes girls if they behave like boys. It assigns different and unequal roles for men and women. This creates differences between men and women which are attributed as natural. The unequal treatment towards women has always left them as disadvantageous. Lerner observes

“Gender is the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dances.” (Lerner 1986:239)

The most baffling thing is that in the name of eulogizing women, different roles are ascribed to women in which they must fit. At different stages of life a woman performs her ascribed roles of life and at the end becomes a non-entity. Kumkum Sangari has aptly pointed out

“Femaleness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of femaleness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretations, and see what it is composed of, what its social correlations are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be.” (Sangari 1991:57)

Indian society being patriarchal and gender oriented, the position of women here is an unequal one. Patriarchy only upholds male dominance over women in our society. It wants woman to play her gendered role in the name of motherhood and for the sake of family peace. Partha N Mukherjee researches three processes to the evolution of the position of women in India in the past. Firstly in the spheres of structural elaboration, sex differentiation gradually evolved in such a manner that production, governance and ecclesiastics became the domain of the male sex. Concurrently, the biological capacity of the female to reproduce the human species and ensure its survival, led to her being assigned roles which progressively tied her down to the home. This withdrew her from the wider economic, political and religious arenas of social participation. Paralleling these two processes took place the progressive elaboration of an ideology which rationalized it by means of customs, rituals and religious or social prescriptions. Mukherji opines

“The present predicament of women in India, therefore, arises from the major contradiction between structural inequalities between men and women and cultural rationalizations of them.”(Mukherji 1986)

THE CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The following causes can be located which bring gender inequality in Indian society.

The Discriminating socio-cultural values Indian society nurtures certain values which also go against women. Women are given the values to nurture the family with care and affection whereas men go out to materialize their dreams far away from the day to day chores of household.

The Ingrained Ideologies Ideologies are the ideas that form the basis of an economic or political theory or that are held by a particular group or person. Gender discrimination also creates ideologies which are quite different in both the sexes. Ideologies and taboos are carried forward in male and female as they get it from society at large. These ideologies and taboos impose gender on a child after birth. The male child is teased, for behaving like girls where as the female child is admonished for behaving like boys in our society.

Attitudes and Social Practices Men and women in society have different attitudes towards a male and a female child. There are certain social practices which uplift the status of male in society. At the same time certain practices are there to humiliate the ego of the female. Thus patriarchy transmutes a woman to be docile, timid and emotional. It leads a woman to become almost an object or a thing in the hands of patriarchs. Beauvoir observes.

“.....humanity is made and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being...She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute- she is the other.”(Beauvoir 1984:16)