

Gender, Culture, Freedom and Woman

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore 'gender' as a socio-cultural construct through the lens of feminism. There are evidences in the society around us that confirm certain fixed expectations, bi-laws and roles that determine the 'gender construct'. While culture should bear the weight of schooling people in the right way forward it is found and exposed to have garnered inequality since time immemorial through various discourses of religion, family, education and traditions. The process of socialisation of a child at birth till its conscience shapes, involves the shrewd inculcation of patterns that ensure gender appropriation. Such patterns affect life choices for women and influence a suppressed world-view for them. A peep into the foundational structure and framework of society suggests an imbalance of power and creates a binary divide between the sexes. This study focuses on surfacing these inequalities, tracing their roots to culture and finding a path of freedom.

KEYWORDS: *Inequality, Gender, Culture, Society, Freedom, Power, feminism.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest forms of inequality is the one between women and men. Gender is used as a core concept to understand this inequality. It refers to the social construction of difference between women and men. Gender is not determined by biology but social differentiation between the two sexes and conceptualization of femininity and masculinity. Femininity is an artificial enumeration of the qualities of womanhood. Masculinity is similar but refers to men. In the July of 1848, the 'Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions' signed by 100 women, it was announced that "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men and women are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights (Dash 42)."

Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) opined "Gender is the relations between men and women" (Dash 37). Gender is not determined biological but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principles of Societies and often governs the processes of production, reproduction, consumption and distribution."

Gender, like any other form of inequality, creates a power structure. No power structure can survive for long by simply employing force. It has to create a culture which can justify the unjust power structure

by establishing appropriate values, norms, beliefs and practices. Gender creates a power structure called patriarchy which in turn. Creates the patriarchal culture. Such patriarchal culture is transmitted from generation to generation.

Unequal Power Relations and Oppression of Women

Salvia Walby said, "Patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Dash 21).

The younger generation learns and internalizes patriarchal norms in relation to dress, manners, marriage, family roles, religious rituals, etc. These norms are different for men and women. Men are supposed to develop masculine and women are expected to exhibit feminine qualities. Family , education, religion and traditions play a crucial role in socializing children into gender specific identities.

Gender socialization leads to social differentiation between men and women in family and society. Women are considered fit for household work whereas the public domain is controlled by men. Women's mobility and freedom get restricted while men control power, property and other resources of family and community.

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The patriarchal culture prevalent in our society acts as objects obstacle to the development of the full potentialities of a women. Women's body and life are considered to be an objects under Male control. She is normally not free to decide important matters of life like education, career, marriage and choice of life style. Restrictions are put on her freedom to choose dress and friends. Right from her childhood she is constantly persuaded and coerced to behave in ways consistent with male expectations and patriarchal norms. Besides, a sense of physical and psychological insecurity is instilled into her mind by creating exaggerated fears about outside world. As per the UN Declaration on the 'Elimination of Violence Against Women', it is recorded that " Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and that violence against is one of the crucial social mechanism by which women are forced into US awarded it position compared with men. (Dash 85)."

This whole process growing up as a woman was powerfully stated by Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book " The second sex" when she said, " one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". She says that a woman is defined not just by biology but by the attributes of femininity which she is not born with, but acquires during the process of growing up through socialization.

The process of socialization makes a woman develop a sense of dependence and helplessness there by leading to loss of confidence on the part of women. Mahatma Gandhi said "My own opinion is that just as fundamentally men and women are one, their problem must be one, in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active help. (Dash 65)" Gender based discrimination within the family in relation to access to resources, opportunities and freedom makes the condition of girls still more precarious. Concretely speaking such discriminations are visible in education, career building, property ownership and marriage.

Culture and Inequality

The link between culture and inequality is very important. Patriarchal culture is built around the centrality and supremacy of men in family and social life. Cultural values, beliefs and practices determine and justify women's subordinate position by making it appear natural and normal. Different religions also justify women's traditional role as God's making. Her role as wife and mother is glorified and her life gets reduced to that of a care giver.

Gender inequality and discrimination is accompanied by deprivation of freedom in personal and social life. Restrictions imposed on girls and women are suffocating. Culture is the source of and justification for most of such restrictions on freedom. Freedom and access to resources and opportunities are essential preconditions of development of capabilities of any human being. All human beings irrespective of gender have talents, potentialities, desires and ambitions. Lack of adequate freedom prevents them from realizing their potentialities and fulfilling their ambitions. Life becomes a frustrating experience. A girl may nurse ambitions like becoming a scientist, politician, entrepreneur, artists, etc. But she may finally land up as a housewife or combine a minor job with responsibilities of a housework. Not living up to one's potentialities and reasonable ambitions because of patriarchal culture is a wastage of human life. An ethical and human society must learn to consider women not as goddesses or slaves but as normal human beings.

Discourses and Structures that Further Inequality

Prevailing institutions of marriage and family require to be critically examined and reformed to become non discriminatory and democratic in all matters women must have freedom to choose and decide for themselves. Domestic work including child rearing and old age care needs to be shared by both male and female members. Upon asking a home maker about her work, she said, "The daily routines of your wives commence from early morning to late night... Someone asked her..... Are you a working woman or house wife? She replied yes I am a full time working house wife.. ... all hours and get paid with a sentence "What do you do all day" (Dash 181).

There is no difference between man and woman in God's creation. Both are God's gifts. The status and development of man is impossible without woman and woman without man. Mahatma Gandhi said -"I make no distinction between man and woman. Woman should feel just as independent as men. Bravery is not man's monopoly" (Dash 1).

However, in a male-dominated society, male dominance is seen in all spheres. In 3100Bc, male-dominated societies appeared in Eastern civilization. The women's liberation movement began in the 1970s. It started in Europe with the main demand that men and women should be equal. The main demand was that women's media should participate equally with men in the political, economic and cultural spheres.

Constitutional Provision and the Way Forward

India is known for its secularism and democracy. The government is trying to bridge the gender gap in the

society. In the source of the constitution, both men and women have equal importance and the constitution is dedicated to all the people. There is no discrimination on the basis of gender, social, cultural, economic and political justice, freedom and equality.

The first article of Human rights states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." This ensures equality in protection and service to each individual irrespective of sex or gender or any such discrimination.

Liberal and egalitarian family values must be accompanied by democratic and feminist transformation of public life. Patriarchal culture and power structure must end for freedom of women to be realized. A Sanskrit Shlok highlights the role of a woman this, "She in relation to her husband is like a mother while cooking and serving food, secretary while he is working, servant at his feet courtesan in his bed and earth-like and forbearance. A woman must not be defined by her service to a man.

Conclusion

Thought trends in the feminist movement explore 'gender' as not a biological but a social construct. The divide and discrimination between men and women comes part and parcel of the patriarchal inclinations of culture. Process of socialisation of a child incorporates certain expectations and superimposition of qualities specific to the sexes, agreed upon by the society. Pockets of power continue to be monopolised by the patriarchy in terms of commodity, property,

jobs and ownership. The paper seeks to study the juxtaposition of gender and culture with a broad aim for liberation from narrow structures of control.

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