GENDER EVOLUTION: A STUDY OF STATUS OF WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE AGES OF FEMINISM

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'Gender' is one of the busiest, most restless terms in English language. Gender must not discriminate with how females and males really, they are, but with the way that a given culture or subculture sees them and therefore the primary issue is to examine how they are 'culturally constructed'. Gender is not a natural process that emanates from the body; it is a socially structuring activity. Social division is based on gender. Gender refers to the cultural categories of femininity/masculinity based upon the biological division. We can also identify a person's gender by his identity and gender role. Gender identity refers to a person's self-concept: that is, one's own sense of whether one is female or male. By contrast, gender-role refers to a role that society expects according to one's gender; it thus involves the acceptance that kinds of behavior (feminine versus masculine) are appropriate for each gender.

Sex is about anatomical difference but when it becomes culturally intelligible, it becomes gender. Gender is also an inscription of the past. "Many people regard this opposition as 'natural', a word which can be used to mean 'biological', or 'God given', or 'morally correct', or all three. Yet the research published in sociology, social anthropology, literature, and psychology suggests that most of the things we associate with being male or female are cultural: that is, they are socially determined, and highly changeable throughout history and across the world."[1] The gender discourse starts at the time of birth and a complex process of labeling begins. The first process is naming a child. The names given to children tell us quite a lot about them, including fixing them into a context by region, religion, and ethnic group. Then children's dressing (tracksuit for boys and frilly frocks for girl), the color of their dress (pink for girls and blue for boys), manners (boys aggressive while girls fragile) and many more traits are attributed to the children. The woman's speech is hesitant and less definite than men. The social construction of gender takes place through the working of ideology. According to Althusser, ideology is that system of beliefs and assumptions - unconscious, unexamined, invisible - which represents: "the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[2]

Gender is constructed in patriarchy. Patriarchy - institutionalized male supremacy - probably arose in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BC and gradually spread all over the world. Two influential theories of the emergence of the patriarchy help explain this process. It appeared in an 1884 essay, On the Origin of the Family and Private Property and the State, by Friedrich Engels. Engels argued that the subjugation of women began only when economic surpluses accumulated; thus, private property, which leads to class hierarchy and the formation of the states, is the source of women's oppression. When individual families replaced larger clan and communal living groups, women lost their reciprocal roles. In short, Engels argues that private property was the source of "the world historical defeat of the female sex."[3]

The power relations existing between the two partners in a marriage determine the supremacy of one partner over another. Although the book Elementary Structure of Kinship (1969), a monumental work by Claude Levi- Strauss is not a critique of the sex gender system, feminists are interested in his analysis of the dichotomy between nature and culture. In his analysis of kinship, Levi-Strauss proposes that social order is always based on kinship system. Marriage is to create social link between two groups which gives rise to social organization. Women are the gifts which men exchange with each other. Women are gifts not givers; they have no significant power over the system, which is controlled by men and works

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[1] Sara Delmont, **The Sociology of Women: An Introduction**, p.10

[2] Louis Althusser, '**Ideology and State Apparatuses**'. P. 17

[3] Friedrich Engels, **The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State**, p. 50

to their benefit. In words of Gayle Rubin, a sociologist, "kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage, names and ancestors, rights and people, men, women, and children- in concrete system of social relationships."[4]

I think Feminists question the traditional separation of the society into the 'private' and `public' spheres with its relegation of the women to the family, to a domestic realm which is conceived as a refuge from the world of work and competition of men in marketplace and empire. Feminists demonstrate that the 'private' and 'public' are interdependent — that the 'personal is political'. Another influential theory of sex-gender system builds on an opposition between nature and culture. Sherry. B. Ortner propounds, "The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact."[5]

FEMINISM IN INDIA

Since Anand, Narayan and Rao belonged to India and wrote about Indian scenes and sensibilities, it is necessary that the study of the position of women in the Indian context be undertaken. It also becomes imperative to assess the dimensions of the socio-cultural milieu their female characters spring from. The status of women in India has varied in different historical periods and has also been subject to differentiations according to caste, religion, and ethnicity. The general situation, however, was one of suppression and domination within the bounds of a patriarchal system. Whether the woman in question belonged to a peasant family working in the field or belonged to upper caste family living a life of leisure, she was a victim of a set of values that demanded implicit obedience to male domination, and of many other social practices that circumscribed her life. However, in ancient India women enjoyed considerable freedom and privileges in the spheres of family, religion, and public life. The position of women was satisfactory in the Vedic age. Vedic age was the golden period of Indian womanhood. "During the early Vedic period women in India enjoyed almost an equal status with men in different spheres of life."[6] In the pre-Aryan society according to D. D. Kosambi, agriculture was the monopoly of women. Woman was the first potter and weaver.'[7]

Girls were no doubt less welcome than boys, but they were treated compassionately, and they had their shares in the family and public life. Girls were educated like boys, and they had to pass through a period of 'Brahmacharya'. Radha Kumud Mookerjee opines that: "Nile Rigveda shows abundant evidence pointing to the fact that women were fully the equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of the absolute Brahma."[8] Women philosophers were called Brahmavadini (i.e., learned women). Gargi, Vachaknavi and Maitreyi were well known philosophers of the Vedic period.[9] During the period of Brahamanas and Upanishads a perceptible change in the condition of women occurred. There was gradual decline in the female education as the period advanced. Their movement was curbed and tendency to curtail women's religious rights arose. Still, in Panini's grammar (500 B.C.) several passages show that women had other careers open to them apart from a mere literary one.

The position of the women worsened further during the medieval period. With the advent of the foreigners, veil system came into existence. Emphasis on chastity increased and it was expected that they should remain chaste not only in her conduct but also in her thoughts. Feminism started during colonial period by male reformers in nineteenth-century India. Patriarchal system in India was so firmly rooted that it was only men who could decide that it was time for change. The British were responsible

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[4] Quoted in **"The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex**", p. 544

[5] Sherry. B. Ortner, **"Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture"**, P. 67-68

[6] K. M. Kapadia, **Marriage and Family in India**, Introduction.

[7] D. D. Kosambi, **The Culture and Civilizations of Ancient India in Historical Outline**, p. 15

[8] Tara Ali Beig, **'Women in Ancient India"**, In Women of India, p.1

[9] G. S. Ghurye, **Vedic India**. P. 289

in sparking this change. Indian traditions were dismissed contemptuously as 'effeminate' by the British. For reformers change was essential for women in various principles like justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and Protection. Most important legal rights that women in India have:

Right to Equality: Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to equality, regardless of their gender.

Right to Education: The right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, makes it mandatory for all children, including girls, between the ages of 6 and 14 to receive education.

Right to Work: The equal Remuneration Act, 1976, ensures that men and women receive equal pay for the same work.

Right against Sexual Harassment: The sexual Harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressed) Act, 2013, provides a framework for addressing complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Right to Property: The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, was amended in 2005 to give equal inheritance rights to daughters in Hindu families.

Right to Marriage and Divorce: The Hindu marriage Act, 1955, gives women the right to seek divorce on various grounds, including cruelty and adultery.

Right to Health: The Maternity benefit Act, 1961, provides women with paid maternity leave and other benefits during pregnancy and childbirth.

Right against domestic violence: The protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides legal protection to women from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by their spouses or relatives.

Overall, while women in India have come a long way in terms of legal rights, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure full gender equality and protection from discrimination and violence.

The Way Forward: to address these challenges and improve the status of women in India, there needs to be a concerted effort from all sectors of society. The government needs to continue to implement policies that promote women's health, education and economic at all levels of society. The media also has a role to play in promoting positive messages about women and combating gender stereotypes. In conclusion, the status of women in India has improved significantly in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. It is essential to recognize the achievements made so far and continue.

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