

Block

4

GENDER RELATIONS IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

UNIT 1

Kinship and Gender **5**

UNIT 2

Family and Gender **15**

UNIT 3

Religion and Gender **30**

UNIT 4

Education and Gender **48**

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BLOCK 4 GENDER RELATIONS IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Introduction

In this block we aspire to understand gender relations in social institutions such as kinship, family, religion and education. These social institutions have been an integral part of anthropology since its inception. The study of kinship basically did away with the notion that kinship is simply biology but brought into focus the fact that it is more a human creation factored by culture. In the unit on Kinship and Gender (Unit 1), we shall discuss how the biological creation of 'man' and 'woman' have been interpreted as 'male' and 'female' in different societies. The construction varies in relation to a patrilineal or a matrilineal society. In most of the matrilineal societies the authority lies with the male counterpart while descent, lineage and inheritance pass through the female line. Matriarchy as a norm is absent in matrilineal systems. With the passage of time the focus has shifted from the mere study of kinship relations to the study of kinship based on the changing patterns of relationships like live-in, lesbian-gay, single parent etc.

Of all the social institutions, family is the most ubiquitous. The family is the site for reproduction, production and consumption. It is the primary agency of socialisation or enculturation within which the new generation learns the norms, values and life-ways of their social group. It is also the primary agency of identity formation within which an individual learns what roles she/he is expected to play and positions to occupy. Symbolic interactionist theorists like Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead have emphasised that it is within primary groups like the family that an individual develops a sense of 'self', and learns how to shape and regulate behaviour with reference to the expectations and value judgments of the wider social group. In a nutshell, it is the family that facilitates the development of the individual organism into a social 'person'. These concerns are taken up in the unit on Family and Gender (Unit 2).

The centrality of gender as a fundamental organising principle of the institution of family cannot be underestimated. Gender shapes our personalities, structures our opportunities and expectations and constrains and controls our behaviour. The family operates as a site of reproduction and production and domestic labour is gendered and the idea of 'separate spheres' places women and men into distinct slots as homemakers and breadwinners. Besides the discourses of heteronormativity, motherhood and caring has further exacerbated the gender issue. The family system creates gendered subjects through gender socialisation as in the case of patrilineal Hindu society. In Unit 2 we shall also look into the change and transformation in the systems of gender and family in contemporary Indian society.

Earlier studies on the status of women often focused on the economic component. Researchers would adequately reflect the independence of women and show a true reflection of their status. Studies showed that the understanding of the economic status of women was not enough to understand women's status as a whole. It was that control over resources was governed by control over religious and/or magical factors. It is because of these reasons that gender would be incomplete if it were not linked to religion. This is why our understanding of

gender would be difficult if not impossible, since we would not understand the links or importance of religion in the relationships and differences between men and women. This is explored in the unit on Religion and Gender (Unit 3).

In the unit on Education and Gender (Unit 4), the inter-linkage between gender and education would be looked from the historic evolution of educational concerns for women on the world scene as well as concerns of women's education as understood by feminist scholars in India. We intend to highlight the socio-political and cultural context within which gender concerns feature in educational reality and educational experience, for women. We must understand that gender, in educational context must not be understood as a social constraint, solely, relegating individuals as passive recipients but as performative in its essential characteristic, that is, it must be understood through. In essence, gender must be understood within the discourse of 'doing gender'. Such conceptualisation not only respects the agency individuals may exercise towards social change but also understands social processes as a more dynamic process evolving through participation between society, and individuals.

Education, works towards establishing and reinforcing gendered role expectations through various ways. It reflects the socio-cultural ideas of gendered identity for both men and women and socialises, effectively, through various means, the young into accepting, respecting, and conforming to these expectations. Education is in this way fed by, and feeds into the existing gender-disparate and restrictive-oppressive ideas of the society.

At another level, education has the potential to question and through initiating a critical enquiry, engage with existing gender disparity. It holds the potential to act as a trigger towards social change and inclusion through critical engagement, economic empowerment, and socio-political representation.

Sex as biological fact and gender as cultural and social construct draws from the works of Gayle Rubin and others furthered the argument and drew from the works of Marcel Mauss on gift societies and Claude Levi-Strauss's work on incest and taboo to explain the related phenomena of devaluation of women in societies. This devaluation comes to play a significant role in determining choices and shaping experiences of women. This understanding of devaluation of women would also help us understand the educational reality in Indian context and the restricted progress we have made with respect to correcting gender imbalance in national educational scenario.

UNIT 1 KINSHIP AND GENDER

Contents

- 1.1 Introduction
 - 1.1.1 Historical Sketch
 - 1.1.2 Matriarchy versus Patriarchy
- 1.2 Kinship and Gender Roles
- 1.3 Gender in Patrilineal and Matrilineal Societies
 - 1.3.1 Lineage, Descent and Authority
 - 1.3.2 Marriage and Affinal Relations
- 1.4 Regional Difference seen in Kinship Based Gender Relations in the Whole of South-Asia and India
- 1.5 Present Trends in Studying Kinship and Gender
- 1.6 Summary
 - References
 - Suggested Reading
 - Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



This unit will help you to understand how:

- the study of gender and kinship came up;
- gender is viewed in patrilineal and matrilineal society; and
- the changing trends in gender and kinship is studied.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit would focus on the anthropological studies of kinship and gender. The attempt herein is to understand how the study of gender in kinship has been taken up after the 1970s or as popularly known as ‘the second wave of feminism’ rather than to focus on gender itself. The unit would begin with a historical sketch of the study of kinship related to Morgan, patriarchy versus matriarchy and then move on to discuss how the various avenues like marriage and affinal relations, lineage, descent and authority in patrilineal and matrilineal societies etc. were explored after the 1970s or the classical period. Herein, the works of Schneider, Gough, Rubin and Leela Dube would be taken up as examples to explore the change in focus in kinship studies that gave a new perspective to the study of kinship.

1.1.1 Historical Sketch

The study of kinship as we all know is an integral part of social anthropology since its inception. Morgan’s two major works *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1870) and *Ancient Society* (1877) established kinship as a key area of research in anthropology. These works were based on the ethnographic data of the Iroquois, an American Tribe studied by Morgan

during his student days. The terms 'classificatory' and 'descriptive' widely used in kinship studies in describing systems of relationships were coined by Morgan.

During the 19th century anthropologists worldwide concentrated on the collection of genealogies, the study of kinship relations became the thrust area of most ethnographies. From Morgan to Schneider, Durkheim to Levis-Strauss, W.H.R. Rivers to Malinowski and from Radcliffe-Brown to Fortes, all had taken up the study of kinship relations. Fortes work on *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (1949) based on structural-functional approach takes into account kinship in relation to social structure, which according to Fortes is the fundamental principle of Tallensi kinship relations as they enter into the organisation of collective life. Levis-Strauss in *Elementary Structures in Kinship* (1969) had made an analysis of the systems of kinship and marriage among many aboriginal societies. His 'alliance theory' based on structuralism has been an outcome of these studies in kinship and marriage.

Works of this era reflected the ongoing phase of trying to build up the web of relations through blood ties (biological) and affinal (cultural) relationships. As stated by Malinowski during this period the emphasis was on presenting the 'kinship algebra'. The focus of kinship studies began to change since the late 1960s. Schneider's *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, 1968 highly influenced the later anthropologists in analysing kinship from a different perspective, gone were the days of genealogies. This work reflects on the symbolic representation of culture. In many ways it is regarded as a path-breaking work. Schneider's symbolic approach to culture urges that sexual reproduction was a core symbol of kinship in a system which was defined by two dominant orders, that of nature, or substance, and that of law, or code (Carsten, 2000).

Earlier the biological category of 'male' and 'female' was used as the cue in investigations in kinship relations and many a time the cultural construct was left unexplored. These studies failed to explain the concept of difference between 'man' and 'woman' in terms of cultural construct. What we had were theories postulated by the then anthropologists regarding matriarchy and patriarchy. So first let us understand the concept of matriarchy and patriarchy for a better perceptive of the issue of 'man' and 'woman' which we would take up later.

1.1.2 Matriarchy versus Patriarchy

The question on the evolution of society broached the still disputable debate of matriarchy versus patriarchy or rather which came first. L.H. Morgan as early as in 1851 and 1877 had indicated the early society to be matriarchal in nature. J.J. Bachofen in 1861 had advocated mother right as the predecessor of father right in his work *Das Mutterrecht (Mother Right)*. Bachofen in his work based on three fictitious societies had argued that in the initial stages of civilisation there was complete anarchy or no order. A stage that was associated with free sex or sexual promiscuity with no social taboos or concepts of family, marriage etc., thus, leading to the serious questions of child rearing, sexual access and social authority. At this stage woman as the mother of the child took control and a society based on woman rule or matriarchy (mother right) came up. This finally gave way to a society ruled by men when the women busied herself with the domestic jural rather than the political and economic jural. Thus, according to Bachofen social relationships developed in response to the need for social order.

Whereas, in *Ancient Law* (1861), Sir Henry Maine had stated that patriarchy was the first form of family. He based his work on the study of ancient legal systems of ancient Rome, Islamic law and the Brahmanical laws as encoded by Manu. While, McLennan's work *Primitive Marriage*, (1865) which studied marriage systems also reflected Bachofen's view on mother right. The debate of matriarchy versus patriarchy still continues as we come upon matrilineal societies which are not necessarily based on matriarchy. Matriarchy means mother right whereas matrilineal societies are more based on lineage and inheritance pattern rather than on authority and power. Matrilineality is more often used to refer directly or indirectly to indicate the general position of women (Fuller, 1976:6). However, today in anthropological studies the concept of matriarchy and patriarchy is no longer the prime focus as the shift has moved from reconstruction of the evolution of past events to seeking explanations to their functions (Bhattacharya, 1977). In the next section thus, we would discuss kinship based construction of gender role to understand the social construct of 'man' and 'woman'.

1.2 KINSHIP AND GENDER ROLE

Kinship defines the rules of marriage (whom to marry). Scholars in the 1970s had accepted the fact that in a society the way kinship and sexual relations are organised determines the way in which men and women behave. This is a social construct and varies from culture to culture. In order to understand the shift from 'male' and 'female' to the social construction of 'man' and 'woman' let us discuss Rubin's work *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex*, 1975 which paved the way for scholars to think in a new direction. This work is built on the premises of universal suppression of women that was doing the rounds during the period. Further to understand this fact Rubin evaluates the sex-gender system. She states that in order to do away with the generalisation of universal suppression, one must understand how in a particular society gender roles are constructed on the basis of biological sex. Margaret Mead's work *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1935 wherein she had worked on the social personality and social construction of gender was a step towards the study of kinship and gender, though only later it became a full-fledged discipline.

In Rubin's work she takes up the theories of Marxism (Karl Marx) and Structuralism (Levi-Strauss) to advocate how gender role is constructed. Rubin states that Levi-Strauss' (1967) work on structuralism is an explanation in itself about why societies divide men and women and answers the question of the existence of sex-gender systems. Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*, 1950 based on the principles of exchange gave her the cue to find the answers about kinship and gender roles. Mauss' work had established that gift plays an important role in creating relations between people and subsequently strengthening solidarity and a feeling of obligation to offer mutual support to each other. Levi-Strauss has taken this idea a step ahead and shown that the most important "objects" that people share are their sisters and daughters. Working on Freud's incest taboo, Levi-Strauss had stated that it is one of the primary reasons that people want to give away their daughters and sisters in order to create new relations. Rubin detects an androcentric element in Levi-Strauss' work wherein his reference to people actually is perceived as 'men' (Uyl, 1995). Levi-Strauss has projected women as means (of exchange) resulting in civilisation and evolution of culture. He sees the suppression of women as a process of 'culture'

and 'civilisation' (Leacock 1983 et. al). Rubin argues that if women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. Further the traffic of women places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology (pp 102). We would further this discussion when we take up marriage and affinal relations in matrilineal society.

1.3 GENDER IN PATRILINEAL AND MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES

Patrilineal and matrilineal societies are established on the rules of lineage, descent and inheritance. In a patrilineal society the rules of lineage, descent and inheritance follow the male line i.e., kinship is traced through the father, while in matrilineal society kinship is traced through the mother. We have discussed lineage, descent and authority in our first year course, thus; herein we would concentrate on how the later anthropologists have looked at it beyond tracing genealogies.

1.3.1 Lineage, Descent and Authority

In *Matrilineal Kinship* 1974, Schneider and Gough has regarded matrilineality in some human societies as one of the ways in which kinship system is organised. In such societies descent groups run through the lines of the women (Schneider, 1974). Kinship system determines whom to marry or to select as sexual partners or spouses. In matrilineal descent two sisters' children and their daughters; and granddaughters' children cannot have any sexual or marital relations as they belong to the same lineage. Yet brothers' children are eligible for sexual or marital relations commonly known as cross cousins as they belong to different lineages.

Here, let's take up Gough's study of the *Nayar, North Kerela, Nayar, Central Kerela, Tiyar, North Kerela en Mappilla: North Kerela*, 1974 for a better understanding of gender and kinship role in a matrilineal society. Gough has stated that the Nayars, a matrilineal descent group traditionally lives in large houses known as *taravads*. A *taravad's* descent is traceable to a 'primordial mother' who established the lineage and thus the head of the lineage is always a woman. A *taravad* when it becomes too large is split into *tavazhis* (lineage branching off following the female line). Yet, the *taravads* were represented by the *karanavans* or political representative, the lineage elder. Sometimes he represented different *tavazhis* as smaller lineages rarely had their own *karanavan* (Gough: 327). The men of the *taravads* were responsible for their sisters and their children and had to defend the honour of the *taravad* at all times. The most powerful Nayar lineage which managed an entire area had a system of succession, whereby the ruler was succeeded by his sister's son (Uyl, 1995). Yet, sons and daughters belong to the *taravad* they are born in and are entitled to the property. Women are considered equal when it comes to inheritance yet authority lies with the men who are responsible for the well being of the *taravads* in economic and political matters.

1.3.2 Marriage and Affinal Relations

Talikettukalyanam is an important ritual that takes place in the life of a Nayar girl before she reaches puberty. This is literally the tying of the *tali* marital chain which symbolises the sign of marriage and a girl acquiring the status of an 'adult woman'. A girl thus, achieves the status and the right to continue the lineage.

Talikettukalyanam marks an important ceremony and if not performed before a girl reaches her puberty it is believed that *Bhagavati's* (ancestral deity) wrath can befall on the *taravad* with a failed harvest etc. According to Douglas *talikettu* is a ritual that guarantees the caste position of a woman and her children. The fiction of first marriage in a girl's life lifts the burden of protecting the purity of blood of the caste Douglas (1988: 145). While, Uyl 1995, states that the *talikettu* ceremony accentuates the ritual shaping of the unity of the lineage by the ceremonial announcement of the eligible females in terms of fertility who would continue the lineage in the future.

In the matrilineal Nayar society a woman after marriage can have relations with other men besides her husband but she has to follow the rules and norms of the society. She cannot take a man belonging to a caste lower than hers as a lover. Usually, a woman after marriage continues to live in her natal home and her husband visits her. Such a residence pattern has been termed as 'duolocal' by Gough (1974: 335). Fortes work on the Ashanti of Ghana also reflects a similar nato-local residence pattern. Very rarely a woman marries and moves to her husband's *taravad*, but even so she and her children always belong to the *taravad* she was born in, with which she shares economic and social ties.

A Nayar woman is free to begin a *sambandham* (relationship) and if she wanted to discontinue the same she could simply ask her lover to leave and 'close the door'. The phrase 'close the door' is indication enough that the *sambandham* has come to an end. A Nayar man can likewise choose to visit his mistresses/lovers outside his *taravad* and stay as a visiting husband for a certain period of time or can just stay until the following morning. As both the Nayar men and women are allowed to have relations with more than one man or woman therefore, whenever a Nayar man visits a woman he leaves his weapon (sword standing upright in the earth) in the front entrance of the woman's house signifying his presence.

Uly, (1995) has stated that a closer look into the tradition of *sambandham* practiced among the Nayars refutes the theory of exchange of women that was postulated by Levi-Strauss. In his work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969), Strauss has included in his theory matrilineality as a principle that structures society. The theory of exchange of women was based on a universally assumed idea of dominance of men over women. The universally presumed male power has made Levis-Strauss' theory applicable to both patrilineal and matrilineal societies, that in patrilineal societies men exchange daughters whereas in matrilineal societies men exchange sisters. Fortes and Levis-Strauss in their work have brought forward the importance of the mother's brother in authority and inheritance in matrilineal societies. However, Uly, (1950) in her work raises the question of whether the authority of mother's brother extends to the daily affairs, is he the deciding authority as to with whom his sister can develop a *sambandham* or in deciding the time for religious ceremonies? Likewise, Postel-Coster, (1985) (a), Lemaire, (1991) has also raised and explored the questions regarding the validity of the exchange of women in matrilineal and matrilocal societies and about such societies being really a matter of men being exchanged.

1.4 REGIONAL DIFFERENCE SEEN IN KINSHIP BASED GENDER RELATIONS IN THE WHOLE OF SOUTH-ASIA AND INDIA

Leela Dube's *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia* (1997), which is one of the pioneering works in this field, is being taken up in this section. Leela Dube's work is based on the comparative study of Hindus, Muslims and Christians in India, high caste Parbatiya Hindus and Newars of Nepal, Muslims of Bangladesh and Pakistan, bilateral Malaya Muslims of Peninsular Malaysia, the bilateral Javanese and matrilineal Minangkabau of western Sumatra and their offshoot in Negri Semblian, the Buddhist Thai, and the lowland Christian Filipinos (1997: 2). The comparison is between the two regions of Asia—South Asia predominantly patrilineal and South-East Asia predominantly bilateral, with a presence of matriliney in both. Dube's main concern was to find out how gender roles were conceived and enacted, how men and women are viewed and the implications thereof in the maintenance and reproduction of a social system. The major aim was to understand the differences in kinship systems and family structures that accounts for the variations in gender roles in different societies.

Dube's work takes into account the various aspects of kinship i.e., marriage, conjugal relations, implications of residence, rights over space and children, family structures and kin networks, work, female sexuality, and limits set by bodily processes in a comparative study. The study depicted a striking difference in the two regions. South-East Asian women showed extraordinary level of independence in economic and social life and social equality between the sexes was also seen due to the exposure of education. This contrasted majorly with the situation in South Asia, characterised by strong patrilineal, patrilocal family structure, women lacks knowledge in terms of their rights, and concerns about female sexuality. Catholic influences have reflected in constrains on the womenfolk in Filipino, though in legal matters in Philippines and Thailand, women enjoyed equal rights in terms of inheritance and other resources. The law allows equitable division of conjugal property and in terms of custody of children; a mother's status is always strong.

Thus, Dube's work portrayed critical differences in South Asia and South-East Asia and also within each region. Dube has stated that close scrutiny makes one realise that in both types of unilineal descent system it is necessary to underplay the role of one parent- that of the father in matriliney and that of the mother in patriliney. Herein, she cites examples of other works done in this regard of Postel-Coster (1987), Prindiville (1981) who have stated that in matrilineal and patrilineal kinship there is less flexibility in formation of groups and in the exercise of interpersonal relationships than there is in bilateral kinship. Natural differences between males and females are believed to affect social organisation and rights and obligations (*Women and Kinship*: 154). Dube draws upon Schneider and Gough's work of 1961 to reflect upon the universal argument that in all societies' males' exercise authority, while in a patrilineal society lines of descent and authority converge. It is basically a conflict among men to wield authority, be it a matrilineal or patrilineal society. Yet again there are instances which states otherwise, like in Lakshadweep island of Kalpeni it was seen that concentration of authority was on an elderly woman of the village respected by kinship statuses that have considerable influence (L. Dube 1991a, b, 1993, 1994).

1.5 PRESENT TRENDS IN STUDYING KINSHIP AND GENDER

Schneider's work (1968) gave a new lease of life to the then dying study of kinship. As stated earlier Schneider's work focused on the role of nature or biology in an anthropological analysis of kinship. Though his work left many questions unanswered like the contradictions between different 'natures' (Franklin, 1997), yet it paved the way for later anthropologists to explore these avenues.

Marilyn Strathern's *After Nature*, (1992) is one such work which had taken Schneider's work forward. *After Nature* explores kinship relations after the coming of the new age reproductive technologies. This work is based on the late-twentieth century English culture, the consumer and their choice of procreation using new technologies. Herein, Strathern argues that the new technologies have brought a new meaning 'nature' which was earlier taken for granted. Technological developments have opened up avenues which were earlier not available to the consumer resulting in destabilisation of earlier notion of nature. The effects of new technologies such as sperm banks, in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and surrogate motherhood which allow one to choose rather than nature take its course leads to question in kinship relations. Strathern reflects upon the new age technological developments in the reproduction system as significant shift and states that what has been taken as natural has now become a matter of choice, nature has been 'enterprised-up'. The more nature is assisted by technology, the more social recognition of parenthood circumscribed by legislation, the more difficult it becomes to think of nature as independent of social intervention (1992b:30).

Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship by Kath Weston (1991) is yet another work in the field of contemporary anthropology in gender and kinship studies. This work looks at the construction of identity in the domain of kinship not based on blood or marriage but by choice- ties between gay men and lesbian. Weston's work opened up a relatively unexplored avenue for social anthropologists to study the gay and lesbian relationships where people create ties as families and friendships based on the idea of commitment. This work established a standard for gay and lesbian ethnography thus, leading to a transforming intellectual impact on the gay and lesbian studies in the 1990s as had the feminist's studies done in 1980s. The focus of Weston's study was the families that the gays and lesbians had created rather than on the families they were born into, a choice that has become a key element in constructing kinship. The children adopted into a gay or lesbian family are supported and surrounded by kinship based on friendship rather than on blood ties. In times of crisis these families also rise up to the occasion as is depicted in the last chapter of the book. Weston's work describes "a more subtle process of symbolic expansion, a system whereby the meanings associated with kinship- durability, resilience, and permanence- are transferred to gay and lesbian relationships because they display those qualities as much as or even more than the relationships based on biological links" (Lewin: 1993: 977).

In the present era live-in-relationships, single parent and the kinship patterns that are coming up due to re-marriage also falls within the scope of kinship and gender studies. The vocabulary of kinship terms has also come under the scanner

as it needs to introduce terms of reference for relatives of second marriages and terms of address for new relations thus created between children from ex-partners and parents of the new partner.

1.6 SUMMARY

The study of gender and kinship basically did away with the notion that kinship is simply biology but brought into focus the fact that it is more a human creation factored by culture. Herein, this unit we have seen how the biological creation of 'man' and 'woman' have been interpreted as 'male' and 'female' in different societies. The construction varies in relation to a patrilineal or a matrilineal society. In most of the matrilineal societies the authority lies with the male counterpart while descent, lineage and inheritance pass through the female line. Matriarchy as a norm is absent in matrilineal systems. As stated by Ortner, 'the whole scheme is a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature. Woman is not 'in reality' any closer to (or further from) nature than man- both have consciousness, both are mortal' (pp 84). With the passage of time the focus has also shifted from the mere study of kinship relations to the study of kinship based on the changing patterns of relationships like the live-in, lesbian-gay, single parent etc.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the concept of matrilineal and patrilineal descent with emphasis on gender.
- 2) Explain with suitable examples the meaning of kinship and gender roles.
- 3) Discuss the emerging trends in kinship and gender studies.



UNIT 2 FAMILY AND GENDER

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.1.1 Reproduction and the Family
 - 2.1.2 The Domestic Division of Labour
- 2.2 Sexuality, Heteronormativity and the Family: Control of Female Sexuality
 - 2.2.1 Sexuality
 - 2.2.2 Heteronormativity
- 2.3 Gendered Discourses on Motherhood and Caring
- 2.4 Becoming Gendered: The Family and Gender Socialisation
- 2.5 Family and Gender Relations in Transition
- 2.6 Summary
 - References
 - Suggested Reading
 - Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the family as a ‘gendered institution’ in a cross-cultural perspective;
- discuss sexual division of labour, social construction of sexuality and discourses of motherhood and caring;
- explain how socialisation practices construct gendered subjects; and
- understand changing dimensions of family and gender relations in Indian society.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Of all the social institutions, family is the most ubiquitous. Sociologists and anthropologists have devoted much time and energy towards the study of the family across cultures. The family is the site for reproduction, production and consumption; it is the primary agency of socialisation or enculturation within which the new generation learns the norms, values and life-ways of their social group; it is the primary agency of identity formation within which an individual learns what roles she/he is expected to play and positions to occupy. Symbolic interactionist theorists like Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead have emphasised that it is within primary groups like the family that an individual develops a sense of ‘self’; and learns how to shape and regulate behaviour with reference to the expectations and value judgments of the wider social group. In a nutshell, it is the family that facilitates the development of the unsocialised individual organism into a social ‘person’.

Gender identity, gender socialisation and enactment of gender appropriate roles are a critical aspect of this process. Our identification as 'male' or 'female' places certain constraints or limitations as well as opens up certain avenues and opportunities in our lives.

Let us begin by clarifying the important distinction made by scholars between the terms 'sex' and 'gender'. In her famous book, 'The Second Sex' (1949) The French author Simone de Beauvoir asserted that 'one is not born a woman; one' becomes one. One may be born as a female of the human race but it is culture, society and civilisation which creates 'woman', which defines what is 'feminine' and prescribes how women should behave and what they should do. Sociologist Ann Oakley made the distinction between biological sex and social gender in her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, first published in 1972. She wrote that the word 'sex' related to the biological differences between male and female in terms of sex organs and reproductive capacities. Gender referred to the cultural meanings ascribed by society and the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

Feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin's classic article "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex" (1975) drew on the theories of authors such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Claude Levi-Strauss to understand the cross-cultural regularities in the status of women. Her theory of the "Sex/gender system" attempted to identify a dynamic system through which the biological features of 'Sex' were transformed into the social features of "gender". In the words of Ellen Lewin (2006:44) "Societies depended upon gender as a way to render persons eligible for particular kinds of manipulation in the social exchanges that occurred through marriages."

Society "needs" men and women, and hence creates them everywhere.

Despite this analytical difference, we see that everywhere the 'natural' or 'biological' differences between male and female are overlaid with layers of cultural meanings and societal prescriptions. Women are thus seen as 'naturally' weak, submissive, nurturing, family oriented, self-sacrificing and unsuited to the hurly-burly of professional commitments, politics, science and technology etc. The 'natural' thus becomes 'social' just as the social and cultural are attributed to biological difference.

The family is the key site where biological sex transforms into social gender. When a baby is born, the first question that is usually asked by anxious relatives and friends is "Is it a girl or boy?" The answer to this question will determine a great many of the life chances and future opportunities and prospects of the infant. It may even play an important role in survival chances, as in some communities, the girl child is viewed as an economic and social burden and may be subjected to fatal neglect or even infanticide. Girl children may not have access to the same quality and quantity of nutrition may be groomed to help in domestic chores and child care while their male siblings may be sent to school or college. Being born male or female plays a crucial role in the division of labour, in the prestige and pay accorded to various kinds of work and in participation in various public spheres like the economy, polity, religious and aesthetic realms of society. Biological differences thus translate into differing cultural expectations and opportunities and, significantly, into discrimination on the basis of this difference. Gender is thus recognised by social scientists as one of the most important axes of stratification and discrimination amongst human beings. Gender

theorists in contemporary times prefer to take an intersectional approach, by studying the manner in which gender interacts and intersects with the other bases or axes of differentiation like race, caste, class, ethnicity etc.

In the present unit, we will attempt to build upon the important arguments made in the previous unit which dealt with gender and kinship. The terms kinship, marriage and family are usually used together in anthropology and it is very difficult to analytically separate them. Any discussion on kinship will necessarily involve family and marriage and vice versa. However by devoting separate Units to **Kinship and Gender** and **Family and Gender** it is expected that you will obtain a deeper insight into the manner in which the most personal and intimate experiences of human life lay the bedrock for a gendered and frequently gender-unjust social structure. Feminists have opined that any attempt to rid society of its gender-discriminatory ideologies and practices must begin within the matrix of the family and intimate relations, with some radical feminists calling for the dismantling of the heterosexual nuclear family itself. Shulamith Firestone's controversial and famous book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1979) is one such extreme viewpoint.

It is important to bear in mind that we cannot speak of the family as a static, unchanging social institution. Definitions of who constitute a family, family organisation, patterns of mate-selection, residence, inheritance etc., exhibit great historical and cross-cultural variation. The family is also embedded within and in constant interaction with other social institutions, including the economy, the state, the legal system, religious and educational institutions. Changes in the institutional matrix have a corresponding impact on family structure, functions and interrelationships. Gender is one of the core themes underpinning these interactions. To give a simple example, sexual division of labour is observed both within the domestic spaces of family and household as well as public spheres like the market and workplace. Any change in one is bound to affect the other. Indeed, as you have earlier read., Friedrich Engels theorised the interrelatedness of capitalism and patriarchy, of class and gender and compared women to the 'proletariat' or oppressed working class whose labour power was 'appropriated' by men/capitalist class. In this unit, we will also be taking a close look at the interrelationship between the worlds of domestic and work through a gender lens.

2.1.1 Reproduction and the Family

One of the important functions of the family is the reproductive function. Men and women come together through the socially sanctioned institution of marriage in order to channelise their sexuality in socially approved relationships and to have children thus ensuring generational continuity.

The ethnographic record does have several examples of "same sex" marriage, eg. The 'berdache' system among the Cheyenne Indians of North America and the "temporary boy-wives" of the Azande of Africa and female-to-female marriages amongst the Nandi community in Kenya (Ember et al, 2007:360). However, these are the exceptions, rather than the rule, and family systems across the world rest fundamentally upon heterosexual unions between men and women.

Feminists opine that reproduction, like all human activities is not a purely biological act but a social one. Even though the acts of conceiving and giving

birth to a child involve biological processes in a fundamental way, they are “overlain by multiple layers of social and cultural practices.” (Bradley, 2007:117)

As mentioned earlier, Engel’s “The Origins of the Family” is regarded as a foundational text by scholars of gender. Reproduction, according to Engels, was of a two-fold character, involving both the production of survival needs like food, clothing and shelter as well as the production of human beings (reproduction) in order to carry on the species. These mutually connected activities involve the most important gender-based activities of the family, namely, domestic labour (housework and childcare) and maternity and motherhood.

2.1.2 The Domestic Division of Labour

In a short but influential article entitled ‘A Note on the Division of Labour by Sex’, Judith Brown (1970) asked the question about whether there was something universal about the kind of work done by women across societies. Surveying an array of ethnographic materials on division of labour by sex, Brown suggested that it was women’s responsibility for the bearing and rearing of young children that determined the nature of division of labour by sex. If women undertook work that was dangerous, kept them away from their children for long periods or interrupted their childcare duties, it would threaten the survival and well-being of their children. As Lewin (2006:42) writes; “Brown’s article thus codifies a classic statement of the relationship between sex and gender: women’s reproductive roles are, in this view, a biological given; the social obligations that arise from them are cultural, but fundamentally linked to that biological foundation that admits few variations. Sex and gender then, are imagined as theoretically divisible, but empirically intertwined, tied together by evolutionary pressures as much as by convention.”

Brown’s formulations set the tone for a good deal of theorising in feminist anthropology particularly the understanding that it was woman’s reproductive role and its attendant responsibilities, viz. motherhood, that were at the core of gender systems across cultures. Irrespective of economic and technological development, women across cultures are charged with a specific set of reproductive responsibilities that determine their participation in activities outside the domestic sphere. Sherry Ortner’s (1974) paper “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture”, interrogates whether women’s close identification with the ‘natural’ realms of reproduction placed them firmly within the ambit of ‘nature’, which, as we know is considered to be of a lower order than its binary opposite ‘culture’, which is associated with the world of men. Esther Boserup (1970) examined various systems of agriculture across the world and observed that less intensive forms of food production such as gathering and early horticulture tended to be more amenable or ‘friendly’ to women’s labour. However, when communities adopted plough based agriculture, which required greater physical strength and intensive labour, men assumed the major role. It can be speculated that when the labour of women is less vital to the survival of the family than that of man, their relative social status also declines.

The notion of ‘separate spheres’, i.e. women in charge of the private, domestic world of housekeeping, cooking, caring and of course, giving birth to babies and men ‘in charge’ of the public spheres including working, earning a livelihood and participating in the other works of society, is in fact at the very heart of the modern, industrial nuclear family.

Gender differences in the responsibility for children are an important aspect of the family as a 'gendered institution'. Tracing the historical evolution of this pattern in American society, Amy Wharton (2005), notes that the word "housework" was not introduced in the English language until 1841, suggesting that in earlier times there was no clear-cut distinction between work performed at home and work performed elsewhere. With the dawn of the industrial revolution, the growth of the factory system and urbanisation, the domains of 'home' and 'work' came to be separated, and this was further reinforced by gender-based division of labour.

"Among the middle class, the workplace became men's domain, while families were seen as populated by women and children. Because middle-class wives cooked, cleaned, raised children, provided emotional support, entertained and sacrificed their own ambitions for their husbands' careers; it was as if married, middle class men brought two people to work, rather than one." (Wharton, 2005:85).

However, it was a different story with the working class. Many working class women had to contribute to the household by taking up waged work. They had to juggle the double responsibilities of 'housework' and 'paid work'. The above example illustrates the complex interplay of gender and class in shaping family arrangements and adjustments. However, it was the middle class experience that became the basis for cultural norms and practices at the workplace, which became an essentially male sphere. As Cancian (1989:17) writes: "In sum, the ideology of separate spheres reinforced the new division of labour, and portrayed a world of independent, self-made men and dependent, loving women. The ideal family was portrayed as a harmonious, stable, nuclear household with an economically successful father and an angelic mother" (c.f. Wharton, 2005:86) Wharton makes the important point that the doctrine of separate spheres was as much prescriptive as descriptive, providing a powerful cultural justification for men to work for pay and women to stay at home and care for the family. If, for some reason, a man was unable to work or provide adequately for his wife and children, he was deemed a failure, an unfit husband and father. Likewise, a woman was expected to centre her life around the needs and well-being of her family and it was this investment of love and emotions that also made her 'unfit' to be a worker. A woman who was unwilling to be a full-time caretaker was also stigmatised and her 'femininity' was held in doubt.

In the Indian context, Maitreyi Chaudhari traces the recasting of women as creatures of domesticity to colonial capitalism and modernity. The 19th century social reform movement was strongly influenced by Victorian values and culture, and accordingly, Indian women were sought to be educated and moulded to fit the 'ideal type' of 'reformed' women. This new Indian woman was to be gentle, refined, and skilled in running a 'home'. Reformers wanted to devise a system of education for women that would "enable the wife to serve as a solace to her husband in his bright and dark moments... to superintend the early instruction of her child, and the lady of the house to provide those sweet social comforts, idealised in the English word – Home" (Chaudhari, 2011:51) The idea of the 'ideal woman' as wife/mother will be taken up for discussion later on in the unit.

Continuing to the discussion on the domestic division of labour, Harriet Bradley (2007) notes that despite the increase in labour market participation of women

in the post World War II period in the West, their domestic responsibilities have not altered significantly. Several research studies show that even “in dual earner families in advanced countries like Australia, Canada, the U.S.A. and Norway, men reported doing only about 25 percent of total housework. The nature of housework men do is also a matter of choice; they play with children, take them out for excursions, read them stories etc. while leaving the routine maintenance tasks like cooking, cleaning and feeding to women. The responsibility for planning and coordinating the household routine falls largely on women; they are the ‘household managers’. Bradley sums up: “women ‘do the housework’; men ‘help’” (2007:120). The gendered nature of domestic work thus creates and sustains gender disparities within the household and at the workplace. Women’s contribution to the running of the household is largely seen as an extension of their ‘feminine nature’ rather than important work in its own right. The coming of the industrial age further sharpened the division between the ‘world of work’ and the ‘world of domesticity’ placing cultural expectations and norms on the performance of both sets of duties and responsibilities. The ‘breadwinner-homemaker’ dichotomy on which the industrial, nuclear household was based has had a profound impact on gender relations within the family.

2.2 SEXUALITY, HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE FAMILY: CONTROL OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

2.2.1 Sexuality

Marriage is the institutional mechanism through which sexual activity and procreation are regulated. While sexuality may seem to be a highly personal, private matter concerning the individual, anthropologists and sociologists maintain that sexual behaviour is socially and culturally learnt. It is also highly variable, as the ethnographic record shows. In many pre-modern societies, sexuality is tightly controlled and rule-bound, due to the requirements of inheritance and the establishment of paternity. The history of wealthy and aristocratic groups in different societies reveals the importance placed on ‘legitimate heirs’ and inheritance. While men have by and large been allowed sexual freedom and to have multiple partners, women have been forced to be strictly monogamous and confine sex to marriage. Bradley (2007) notes that world religions like Christianity and Islam while in theory, uphold marital fidelity for both spouses, in practice take a relatively lenient view of male promiscuity while condemning and punishing non-monogamous women. In the context of Hindu India rigid control of female sexuality is linked with the caste ideology based upon hierarchy, the concept of purity and pollution and the notion of women as ‘gate-keepers’ of the honour of the family, the caste and the community. Female sexuality is viewed as potentially uncontrollable and destructive to both the familial and social order, hence all measures are enforced to ensure that it does not escape the tight control of the natal and subsequently conjugal family. Practices like pre-puberty marriage, restrictions on the movements and activities of married women, disfigurement or even murder of widows and with the advance of technology and bio-medicine, the sinister practice of foetal sex-determination and aborting female children are all the offshoots of the patriarchal ideology that views females as a burden and female sexuality with suspicion and hostility. Rigid prescriptions and proscriptions with regard to marriage rules (hypergamy,

jati endogamy, gotra exogamy, village exogamy etc.) also serve to police sexuality and individual choice in mate selection. Recent instances of young couples being brutally hunted down and sometimes killed by angry kin and community members for going against the traditional rules and selecting ‘unsuitable spouses’ aptly demonstrate the conflict between the ideology of freedom of choice in sexual or romantic matters and the ideology of regimentation or control over sexuality in the interests of wider social networks of kin and community.

2.2.2 Heteronormativity

When we speak about sexuality being as much a social construct as a personal choice, it follows that there is a certain ‘normative’ kind of sexuality that society endorses and approves, i.e. hetero-sexual relationships.

The term ‘heteronormative’ is used to describe the socially approved sexual relationship between a woman and a man. This relationship which potentially results in procreation is at the very foundation of marriage and family. Alternative expressions of sexuality such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bi-sexuality and even voluntary renunciation of sex or ‘celibacy’ are seen as antithetical or against the institution of family. The ‘gay’ community all over the world has been at the receiving end of society’s censure and disapproval, and in many societies, homosexuality was an offense punishable under the law. It is only in recent years that ‘gay rights movements’ or ‘queer liberation’ has succeeded in gaining some legitimacy for alternative sexualities and secured them some legal rights. In India, the decriminalisation of consensual homosexual activity by the ‘reading down’ of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in July 2009 by the Delhi High Court is regarded as a landmark judgment.

2.3 GENDERED DISCOURSES ON MOTHERHOOD AND CARING

There is a powerful ‘discourse of motherhood’ across cultures and through history which places great cultural value on motherhood. In many societies including India, becoming a mother is considered to be a key ‘act’ in a woman’s life and the fulfillment of her womanly destiny. Becoming the mother of a son gives a young woman a better status in the marital home, however, if she gives birth to several daughters in succession, she is reviled. Barrenness is seen as the worst curse that can befall a woman; in many Indian languages she is referred to as a “barren field” (‘baanjh’ in Hindi). Motherhood is associated with the values of selflessness, sacrifice, placing the desires of the child and family above one’s own desires and needs and finding fulfillment in this ‘natural’ function. The psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar has written extensively about the relationship between mothers and children in his work “The Inner World” (1978) which has been of great relevance to students of anthropology as well as psychology. When a young married woman enters her husband’s home, she is virtually a stranger in a strange land who has to often face humiliation, hostility and an unsympathetic attitude from her new relatives. She has to face much physical, mental and emotional anguish before she gets assimilated in the new setting.

Motherhood becomes the culturally sanctioned path to her elevation in status, especially if she produces a male heir. Kakar writes in detail about the intense physical, emotional and psychological bonding between mother and infant and

the powerful cultural and religious imagery about 'good' and 'bad' mothers. While the tight dyadic bond he describes has been challenged by other authors, his insights on the immense cultural weight accorded to motherhood in Hindu India are valuable. The studies of authors like Stanley Kurtz (1992) and Susan Seymour (1999) demonstrate that within the partilineal Indian family, 'multiple-care giving' is the norm, wherein the child is tended to by various other women in the household (grandmother, sisters, unmarried aunts, cousins etc) rather than just the mother.

Within the Western context, the emphasis on the 'woman as homemaker' role discussed earlier has created a powerful discourse on the 'maternal instinct' as an inborn feminine trait rather than as a socially learned and variable practice. The concept of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996; Cheal, 2002 c.f. Bradley, 2007) refers to the 'work' expected of mothers by focusing most of their time and energy upon the child's development, nutrition, education hobbies and play to ensure that s/he gets the best possible start in life. This kind of intensive 'mothering work' places heavy demands on mothers living in nuclear households who cannot rely upon extended kin networks to assist with childcare.

For women in paid employment, the 'double burden' of child care and professional commitments is particularly problematic and leads to feelings of guilt, stress and role conflict. Elizabeth Badinter in her important work *The Myth of Motherhood* (1981 c.f. Bradley, 2007) critiques this model of 'total motherhood' and points out that the role of fathers was commonly ignored even though there is no reason why they should not also be involved in child-care. We note that in the contemporary globalised culture, the image of 'new fatherhood' is also becoming salient and young men are shown to be taking interest in caring for their babies, playing with them, demonstrating public affection to them, accompanying them to school, helping with homework, etc. However, when it comes to decisions regarding staying at home, refusing a job or a transfer, taking leave to look after a sick child or putting 'home' before 'career', traditional gendered expectations usually win the day. Many more women are working outside the house compared to earlier times, but there are still 'housewives'. 'House husbands' or men who choose to stay at home to look after their families are still very rare and usually are the butt of ridicule and jokes. Cultural understandings of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' thus structure relationships of reproduction and production.

The above section has taken you through some of the important dimensions that contribute to the 'gendering' of the family. We now move to a very important area, namely gender socialisation. As you are aware, socialisation or enculturation is the process through which individuals learn cultural norms, values and behaviours. These include the socially approved ways of behaving, thinking and feeling in accordance with sexual identity. Child care practices provide us with useful entry, points into understanding the cultural values that underpin societies, and anthropologists have contributed much in this area. Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament* (1935) and *Male and Female* (1949) were foundational texts. Beatrice Whiting's *Six Cultures: Studies of Child Rearing* (1963) is regarded as a classic cross-cultural text. In the Indian context, the studies of Susan Seymour (1999) Margaret Trawick (1992) Alan Roland (1988), Stanley Kurtz (1992) to name but a few are highly influential works.

2.4 BECOMING GENDERED: THE FAMILY AND GENDER SOCIALISATION

Before you read this section, try this mental exercise. Try to recall the earliest memories of your childhood and the first time you became aware of gender. When was the first time you thought of yourself as a ‘boy’ or ‘girl’? When did you first think of others in your environment as male or female? You will probably realise that gender is a meaningful concept to children as young as three years of age. They can identify themselves and others as female or male.

How do children develop this understanding and start to behave like girls or boys are expected to in that social setting? Is it a biological or genetic response or is it the product of culture and environment? Social scientists agree that biology and genetics definitely play a role in personality and behaviour, however most social scientists agree that it is culture that shapes or acts upon an individual’s biological ‘raw material’ to form a ‘socialised person’, a member of society. The major theories of socialisation include the theories of ‘social learning’ and ‘cognitive development’ which are general theories that are applicable to gender socialisation as well. Another perspective – ‘identification theory’ – was specifically developed to explain gender socialisation and acquisition of a gender identity. While the former theories focus on the way children learn appropriate behaviours through imitation and internalisation from their parents, identification theory draws on Freudian ideas and focuses on how psychological, unconscious processes work in shaping gender identity. Nancy Chodorow’s 1978 classic *The Reproduction of Mothering* is an extremely influential text for anthropologists and sociologists of gender. According to Chodorow, gender identity is formed during early childhood as children develop strong attachments to a same-sex parent or adult, i.e. boys to the father and girls to the mother. However, in societies like the U.S.A. (to which Chodorow belonged) women were the primary care givers and thus children of both sexes developed their early emotional attachments to their mothers. However, as children grow up, boys have to ‘switch’ their identification from mother to father – an emotionally painful and difficult process – especially because fathers are less involved than mothers in child-care. Girls, on the other hand, continue to identify with the mother and learn what it means to be a female from her.

These different paths to gender identification according to Chodorow are responsible for the formation of gender-differentiated male and female personalities. While girls tend to be more connected to others and empathise with the feelings of others, boys are more comfortable with distance and separation and do not develop ‘empathy’ to the same extent as girls. Moreover, girls are more secure of their female identity whereas boys and men may need to ‘prove’ their masculinity every now and then to themselves and to others.

Even though Chodorow has been criticised for generalising on the basis of a particular, historically specific type of family – viz., the Western, nuclear family – her observations about the importance and centrality of the mother’s role in early child care and nurturance are important. Also, the insight that mothering itself is ‘reproduced’ through the formation of a ‘Feminine’ personality that values attachment, nurturance and empathy – traits that are commonly, identified as ‘maternal’ ones – enriches our understanding about how gender is produced and reproduced within the setting of the family.

We shall now discuss how gender is ‘constructed’ through socialisation of children in a specific socio-cultural context, viz. patrilineal Hindu society in India. For this purpose, we shall refer to a well-known article by Leela Dube (2001).

‘On the Construction of Gender: Socialisation of Hindu girls in Patrilineal India’ by Leela Dube systematically traces how women are ‘produced as gendered subjects’ through the intersections of family, kinship and caste which form the institutional matrix of Hindu society. From her very birth, the girl child is made to feel less valuable than a male child, whose birth is welcomed with celebration and feasting. If a baby brother follows her, she is considered auspicious and lucky, if a line of sisters result, the family is pitied. Folk sayings and proverbs like “Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another’s courtyard” clearly demonstrate preference for male children.

“Girls grow up with the notion of temporary membership within the natal home.” (p. 91) Rituals and ‘pujas’ like Durga puja in Bengal and Gauri puja in Maharashtra symbolically celebrate the return of a married daughter to her natal home for a brief, happy period followed by her inevitable return to her marital home, as per the wishes of her husband. A little girl grows up observing marriage ceremonies where the bride is sent off amidst much wailing and display of emotion and hearing proverbs and lullabies which reinforce the message that her stay at the natal home is short-lived.

While a pre-puberty girl is regarded as pure and a manifestation of Devi or Mother Goddess, the onset of puberty on the other hand introduces dramatic changes in her life. She is now regarded as ‘ripe’, ‘mature’ or ‘grown-up’ and this transition is accompanied by rituals and observances including confinement and seclusion, eating special food, a ritual bath, particularly in Southern and Western parts of India and wearing ‘grown up’ clothes like a sari to denote her new status.

Attaining puberty places several restrictions upon a young girl’s freedom and activities; her dress, department, manner of speech, (what Bourdieu refers to as ‘habitus’) must conform to cultural notions of ‘modesty’ and good character so that her marriage prospects are not compromised. Dube cites various proverbs and metaphors from various parts of India, such as:

“Whether the thorn falls on the petal or the petal falls on the thorn , it is always the petal that runs the risk of getting hurt and disfigured”.

“Whatever can happen to buttermilk? It is the milk that gets bad”

“A glass once cracked is cracked forever.”

Krishna Kumar the eminent educationist, writing about his experiences of “growing up male” in a small town in Madhya Pradesh, highlights what he calls the ‘tragic pattern of socialisation’ wherein girls would walk in a close group from school to home without looking here or there whereas boys would use the same street to hang around, run and play or maneuver their bikes. Krishna Kumar writes:

“Watching these silent clusters for years eroded my basic sense of endowing individuality to every human being. I got used to believing that girls are not individuals.” (c.f. Dube, 2001:107)

This candid confession underscores how differential patterns of socialisation amongst boys and girls have implications for future marital and familial relationships wherein women's individuality and agency are neither recognised nor tolerated.

The reinforcement of masculine and feminine identities also takes place in terms of training in household chores and tasks. Earlier in the unit we discussed the gendered division of labour. Girls are trained to do tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, helping with childcare etc. because these are deemed to be naturally 'women's work'. An important component of this is the notion of 'service' or 'sewa' which is instilled in girls through the ideas, values and practices associated with food. Girls are often made to eat leftovers or their food intake is controlled so that their bodies do not look too mature or well-developed and so that they cultivate patience and restraint, learn how to cope with pain and deprivation.

Leela Dube writes:

'While they (girls) are being trained for present and future roles, the fact that they will eventually be going into another family is never forgotten. That a girl will have to leave her parental home is certain; to what kind of home she will go is not. And it will take her years to acquire any powers of decision-making or any autonomy in that new home. There are also many 'ifs' in the process. Socialisation for an unfamiliar setting and an uncertain future imparts a degree of tentativeness and provisionality to the process.'" (p.112)

Males, on the other hand are socialised into placing the continuity of the family at the centre of their lives; they are the inheritors as well as those responsible for the care of the elders in later years. The sense of entitlement and belongingness experienced by boys is in marked contrast to the insecurity and tenuousness experienced by the girl.

We may conclude the section with a very poignant 'bidaai' song (song sung at the time of departure of the bride) from the Hindi belt:

'O father you brought my brother up to be happy,
You brought me up for shedding tears,
O father, you have brought your son up to give him your house
And you have left a cage for me.' (p.93}

2.5 FAMILY AND GENDER RELATIONS IN TRANSITION

We have earlier noted that family systems are not static; they respond to and simultaneously impact other social institutions. In contemporary times, the State has played a major role in the affairs of the family; the state mandated programme to control population and limit family size, for example has had a distinct impact on reproductive behaviour and choices. The enactment of legislations pertaining to family matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, prohibition of dowry, prevention of domestic violence etc. demonstrate that the demarcation between the 'private' and 'public' realms is rather artificial. The women's movement has played an important role in sensitising in society to the crimes

and discriminations being faced by girls and women within the family like dowry, bride-burning, domestic violence, juvenile sexual abuse, feticide and infanticide. The land mark report “Towards Equality” (1974) highlighted the discriminations being faced by Indian women in all spheres including the domestic, a quarter of a century after Independence.

Spread of women’s education, urbanisation and greater female workforce participation, globalisation, the information revolution and the growing impact of mass media, mobile telephony and other means of communication have virtually opened up a new world of possibilities and opportunities for the new generation of men and women.

Alongside these trends, we also note the prevalence of sex-related crimes, marital descriptions and breakdowns, so-called ‘honour killings’, trafficking of women and girls and an alarming decline in the sex ratio. Tulsi Patel (2005) observes that sociologists and anthropologists have not taken sufficient cognisance of the crises confronting the family and have confined themselves to a rather limited range of research questions.

Longitudinal studies provide interesting and rich data on change and continuity in the Indian family. Susan Seymour’s ethnographic work with families in Bhubaneshwar, Orissa spans over thirty years. Her data sheds light on the changing perceptions about family roles, responsibilities and obligations through a gender lens. Comparing the narratives of women across three generations, Seymour notes the gradual shift from ‘interdependence’ towards ‘independence’ and ‘personal autonomy’.

Women have experienced conflicting signals about their roles and identity. Greater access to education, later age at marriage have made girls more independent, at the same time, cultural values of modesty, docility and obedience to family wishes coexist. The continued reliance on ‘arranged marriages seem to prove this.

Seymour notes that the traditional patrifocal family is based upon age and gender hierarchies of authority. Older members have authority over younger ones and males have authority over females. Relationships of authority take precedence over relationships of love or dyadic emotional bonds. Women are expected to refrain from showing overt love and affection to their children and similarly, it is considered improper for a married couple to display love and affection in front of other family members.

However, Seymour’s findings indicate that the conjugal bond (between the married couple) is growing stronger and husbands and wives particularly in middle and upper income families had a more egalitarian relationship. Young women are less fearful and willing to walk out of unhappy marriages.

Helen Ullrich’s (1987, 1994) longitudinal study of Brahmin families in a South Indian Village documents how young women have succeeded in effecting change through education and now take an active role in selecting their husbands. After marriage, they prefer to live in nuclear households where they can be free of the interference of in-laws and share a more intimate relationship. (c.f. Seymour, 1998).

Leigh Minturn's longitudinal study of Rajput women in Khalapur village in North India carried out in 1955 and 1975 also documents greater autonomy and freedom; women could visit their natal homes more frequently, were less deferential to their parents-in-law and cooked food for their husbands and children on separate chulhas. Elders acknowledged that these changes were on account of improved education and greater autonomy and control exerted by their sons in the joint household. Elders are largely philosophical about these changes and accept these as God's will". (c.f. Seymour, 1999: 289)

Susan Wadley's (1999) study of Karimpur, a North Indian village where she had done fieldwork in the late 1960s and to which she returned in 1983-84 also describes significant educational change for women and the impact of television and films on redefining gender roles. Families are growing more 'couple oriented' and young husbands and wives demand their private space within the joint household, which would have been unthinkable to the older generations. Karimpur villagers however see this change as a symptom of disorder, challenging the once well-entrenched caste and gender hierarchies (c.f. Seymour, 1999: 289-90)

The above empirical studies demonstrate the changes in family structure and gender roles wrought about by modernisation. Seymour (1999) raises the following questions:

"To what extent will the patrifocal joint family be able to adjust to these kinds of democratizing changes while retaining the general commitment of family members to the well-being of the collective whole? Will India achieve any better solutions to the dilemma faced in Western societies of how to balance the needs of the family, whether extended or nuclear, with the desire to enhance gender equity and provide women as well as men with personal autonomy?.... Will these women be able to rely on the help of husbands, parents-in-law, and other extended kin in caring for children and the elderly, or will the kinds of familial problems faced by working couples in the contemporary United States simply be duplicated in India?" (p. 291)

These are indeed very important and interesting questions and only time can reveal the answers. There is a need for ongoing anthropological and sociological research on these various dimensions.

2.6 SUMMARY

We have focused upon the centrality of gender as a fundamental organising principle of the institution of family. Gender shapes our personalities, structures our opportunities and expectations and constrains and controls our behaviour. We examined how the family operates as a site of reproduction and production. We noted how domestic labour is gendered and how the idea of 'separate spheres' places women and men into distinct slots as homemakers and breadwinners. We examined how the discourses of heteronormativity, motherhood and caring further exacerbated the gender issue. We examined how the family system creates gendered subjects through gender socialisation and focused on the case of patrilineal Hindu society. In the final section, we discussed change and transformation in the systems of gender and family in contemporary Indian society.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the centrality of gender as a fundamental organising principle of the institution of family.
- 2) Examine how the family operates as a site of reproduction and production.
- 3) Examine how the discourses of heteronormativity, motherhood and caring exacerbate the gender issue.
- 4) Discuss change and transformations in the systems of gender and family in contemporary Indian society.

UNIT 3 RELIGION AND GENDER

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Building Up Belief
 - 3.3 Building Up from the Household Level
 - 3.4 Women, Kinship and Religion
 - 3.5 Women, Society and the Body
 - 3.6 Growing Up in a Supernatural World
 - 3.7 The Mature Woman as a Repository of Culture
 - 3.8 Social Change, Religion and Women
 - 3.9 Summary
- References
Suggested Reading
Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



Having gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the importance of religion and gender through anthropological studies;
- the importance of social belief in shaping gender relations as well as theoretical developments in this area of study;
- understand how gender relations begin with basic family relations and then move on to relations between kins;
- help in understanding how women grow up learning to be within the believed reality of the supernatural world, populated by deities, powers and sacred areas, relations with which are mediated by rituals;
- see how the mature woman in society is thus knowledgeable about religion and this is the basis of transmission of culture from generation to generation, as well as ideas relating to the environment; and
- understand and relate to recent changes in all these issues to show in what areas women are on their way to achieving equality and in what others they are not.

Religion is the substance of culture, and culture the form of religion.

- Paul Tillich

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Earlier studies on the status of women often focused on the economic component. Researchers felt that this would adequately reflect the independence of women and be a true reflection of their status. In 1973, Peggy R. Sanday's studies showed

that the understanding of the economic status of women was not enough to understand women's status as a whole. It was her finding that control over resources was governed by control over religious and/or magical factors.

Thus for Sanday (1973: 1698), "A belief system emphasizing maternity and fertility as a sacred function can also be seen as the legitimisation of sex status which develops because of ecological and economic factors. Furthermore, there is ample evidence in the ethnographic material... that a change in female status is associated with a change in the productive system. Where this has occurred, as with the Ibo, it is interesting to note that sex antagonism develops or increases. Perhaps sex antagonism develops in the absence of a belief system which legitimises and sanctions the power of women. Sex antagonism might be reduced in such societies when a belief system develops in which female power is attributed to the natural functions of women."

It is because of these reasons that gender would be incomplete if it were not linked to religion. This is why our understanding of gender would be difficult if not impossible, since we would not understand the links or importance of religion in the relationships and differences between men and women.

It seems that anthropologists have taken up two basic approaches with regard to sex roles in society. One group strongly believes that such sex roles are based on biological differences between men and women, including the way their minds develop and are structured. The other group, sometimes called the 'environmentalists', strongly believes that though biological differences exist but social and economic differences account for these differences in roles. Cross-cultural studies actually show that in societies like those in Southeast Asia, where physical development between genders is not markedly different, women fill many different roles in society which were traditionally relegated to men. Thus, the 'environmentalists' seem to have the better of the argument.

3.2 BUILDING UP BELIEF

Belief has always been an important cement or bond that links up the people that make up society. It provides a philosophy, a rationale or logic for undertaking tasks in economy, religion, kinship, politics, or any other aspect of society. They may also form the underlying legitimacy for tribes and religious statehoods. Many societies discriminate against women, thus inhibiting their activities in various arenas of the public sphere, an area which involves decisions affecting the community as a whole.

Initial studies of the relationship between anthropological studies of the relations of men and women, leading to differences in their participation in religious beliefs was based on a number of assumptions. These assumptions need to be uncovered before we can proceed further.

People had begun to think that if women were given economic equality, their improvement in status in other arenas of social life was automatically granted by society. This 'economic' bias in the status of women was overturned when people realised that the other arenas in life were also important in giving women a different status. These other arenas included political power, religion as well as kinship relations. Often, control over resources was seen to be a part of control over religious or magical factors. It was also seen to be a matter of kinship.

Sometimes, in cases where women have achieved some degree of control over economic resources, the 'sex antagonism' (a term used by Peggy Sanday in 1973) among women increases as among the Ibo. Thus, the belief system in any society substantiates and legitimises the power of a dominant group in society. Wherever women have achieved economic control along with the support of the religious/belief system, it has led to a decrease in the 'sex antagonism'. Sometimes the religious or magical system underlies the political system also.

Most societies in the world discriminate against women, thus limiting their participation in public life. Thus, community relations and decisions that affect the community are more often taken by men rather than women. Often, it has been stated that in private life, women take the major decisions, but this has also not been universally true. In many tribal societies, every institution of society (like social behaviour related to kinship, marriage, family, economy, politics, religion and law) is interlinked. As a result, the belief system permeates into every sphere of activity. If women are left out of the belief system, then they are thus overlooked in other spheres of life also.

Sherry Ortner in 1974 was thus able design a set of propositions for understanding the factors through which the position of women in society could be measured. They include:

- Statements of cultural ideology which explicitly devalue women, their products, and their roles.
- Symbolic devices, such as the concept of defilement, associated with women.
- The exclusion of women from participation in the area believed to be most powerful in the particular society, whether religious or secular.

In East Africa, the Jie tribe has an age-grade system (after studies conducted by Gibbs in 1965). This system ensures that people who have been born within a short span of time are put into one group. Often, this has relevance to males. People of one age-grade system are given one kind of training and achieve a similar status in society. As they learn about different institutions within society and attain maturity, they are initiated into the religious and ritual practices also. Thus, the eldest of the hierarchy in an age-grade system have the most ritual as well as political power, from which the women are excluded. Thus the Jie did not have any chiefs, political functionaries or centralised political institutions.

However, such social institutions are so complex that it is sometimes impossible to know in which direction social change will occur. Often, if the only organising principle of society is seen to be religion, then women's role in the public sphere related to religion will be limited. When such a society's public sphere becomes more complex, discriminatory practices towards women are likely to be a part of the earlier heritage. Thus, critics of Peggy Sanday claim that the emphasis on maternity and fertility as a sacred function may be not because of the legitimisation of sex status developed out of ecological and economic factors but as something that may be seen as an effect of past events.

3.3 BUILDING UP FROM THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

Many of the early anthropologists working on the status of women focused on the household. This was a necessary part, according to them, of the initial enculturation and socialisation processes that engrained behaviours among individuals. They believed that the relations within the family (or household) were a microcosm of such behaviours found in society at large. Hence, understanding familial behaviour was an important clue towards understanding social behaviour. For social activists, if this family behaviour could be changed, then one could change or better the status of women in society.

It was with this in mind that theorisation has advanced in this area of research. For many feminist anthropologists, the subordination of women was a universal phenomenon observed cross-culturally. Feminist anthropology contrived to focus on the role, status and contributions of women to their societies. A variety of theories were propounded by them to explain this phenomenon. In the 1970s, the field was just formed and only a few or more unified approaches dealing with the universal subjugation of women was relevant. Today, this has spread into a very large number of approaches.

In the 1970s, Marxist theory became popular among them because some of them felt that the idea of class oppression could explain many of the problems encountered by women. Using Marxist models, they could show how capitalist society exploited women as a mode of 'reproduction of labour', thus using their reproductive powers. Engels used the theories of the classical evolutionist Morgan to write *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, where he showed that the oppression of women was linked to changes in the mode of production during the shift of human beings to agriculture (the Neolithic Revolution). Once men started owning property, whether in terms of land or in terms of domesticated animals, they wanted to give it to their sons rather than daughters. They could only do this by overthrowing the earlier matrilineal inheritance patterns, thus globally defeating women. Of course, our present state of knowledge shows us that a true matriarchy never existed, though a few societies still practice matrilineal or double descent systems. This theoretical picture brought in through Morgan showed why the earlier evolutionists were often criticised as being "armchair anthropologists".

Structuralist models also became quite popular at this point of time. The roles of men and women were seen here as being culturally constructed. Due to women's biological function, their arena of activity was restricted to a lower-status role centered round the household thus keeping them relatively safer. On the other hand, the same set of reasons led to the association of men with less safe areas. Even when such environmental conditions no longer existed, these activities became learned behavioural traits for human beings. However, limiting just this idea to structuralist approaches would be to belittle a very large body of ideas that contributed much to the understanding of men and women in different socio-cultural contexts.

Structuralist and Marxist modes of analysis do not see the subjugation of women as a biological fact but as a socio-cultural/behavioural tendency caused by

historical developments in society. Though sexual dimorphism is a fact among human beings, it only allows such discrimination through social norms. It is thus not 'programmed' behaviour. Mead's researches as well as primate behaviour studies both indicated that such behaviour varied widely.

Rosaldo (public/domestic), Edholm (production/reproduction) and Ortner (nature/culture) used dichotomies to theorise female subordination. Ortner's division of nature/culture is based on Lévi-Strauss, who had argued that women were closer to the nature end of the dichotomy because of their role in reproduction. By the 1970s the very basis of the idea of such dichotomies and the idea that women were subjugated everywhere was being questioned. Some anthropologists like Margaret Mead had already put forth the idea that there were societies where males and females enacted roles which were more equal, though they may be doing different things in society. To support this, A. Schlegel and J. Briggs conducted studies among hunting-gathering societies. K. Sachs used a Marxian mode of production study to show how, in such societies, sisters, brothers, husbands and wives had an equal relationship to resources as well as the means.

E. Friedl and Louise Lamphere believe that even under subordination, women had some degree of personal power. These anthropologists claimed that in the domestic sphere women often had some degree of power. Though this power was used individually in negotiating personal relations, they also affected male interactions in the public sphere.

The use of the term gender has thus tended to separate feminist anthropology from simplistic models, like dichotomies. The term gender started to replace the term women in such studies. Thus, inequality was differentiated from purely biological distinctions. Translating culturally fine-tuned gender distinctions seemed to be a problem, and it seemed as if such gender diversity was a universal phenomenon. There was a distinct relationship between the way culture guided thoughts and the resultant individual action, but there also seemed to be a variety and range of individual actions that needed much more fine-tuned approaches that reached deeper into culturally-guided behaviour to understand it. There was also a relationship between the material conditions within which cultures existed and the ideologies that were a part of such material conditions of existence. All-in-all gender opened out a much larger range of human activities to understanding and for research than had ever been possible before, when biologically created sex roles was the only theoretical model that was used.

After this period, then, the issue of identity became a very important point of contact for a variety of feminist anthropologies. Social categories like age, occupation, religion, occupation, status, among others, became important variables. Power continued to play an important role in the analysis. This was because the construction of identity and its enactment by the actors was mediated through discourses and actions that were structured through the environment (whether social or otherwise) of power.

Queer theory also became an important reaction after the 1980s and the post-structuralist reactions against what was considered to be normal. Queer theory challenged the apparent 'normalcy' of heterosexuality (a process which is sometimes called heteronormativity). So, queer theory takes an idea to its logical conclusion by not accepting gender as being a personally constructed identity

but seeing it as something created through a variety of social acts, identities, thoughts and components.

This tour through the theories, approaches and methodologies was important since each theory or approach is like a worldview. Each worldview has its own set of assumptions which methodologically ignores some information while giving precedence to others. By understanding this we will begin to understand how the understanding of women's roles in ritual and religion are shaped. These approaches also show how the household has been seen as a mode of theory and of action in the so-called 'battle between the sexes'. In fact, most people believe now that initial enculturation and socialisation processes within the family are crucial towards the formation of a gender identity and thus a set of behaviours.

3.4 WOMEN, KINSHIP AND RELIGION

Belief forms part of the ideological sub-system. It is one of the most important arenas of the relations between men and women. A belief system in a culture operates by linking up with other sub-systems in culture, like family, kinship, politics, economy, and so on. Women are often crucial to the management of a belief system, though they may be kept out of many aspects of it. This kind of behaviour is also reproduced over generations.

For instance, in Jind district of Haryana, one perception among the people is that religious rituals are maintained by the women of the household. Only household gods are prayed to by the men. Also, genealogies are maintained and remembered by some of the men who become the knowledge-repositories for one or more lineages. Such genealogies are remembered as poetry and may extend from 800 to over 1200 years. However, such genealogies consciously ignored the women who married into the lineage as well as the women who were born within it. Thus, in an everyday sense, men did not usually pray and most houses did not even keep areas where images of gods were kept or prayed to regularly. It was the women who would go to local temples and pray, not only on a daily basis but also whenever they passed the area where images of gods and goddesses had been installed.

One of the most crucial areas which have been targeted by different societies has been women's menstruation periods. There have been a range of taboos associated with women's menstruation that include no contact with men during the period, or with food, and especially with religious rituals. Among the Oraon tribe of Jharkhand, men are not allowed to be with women or even their wives before a hunt or before important rituals because the woman might be menstruating. A hunting expedition often requires the sanction of the gods for its success and the success of the hunt may be forfeited if any of the men come in contact with a menstruating woman or if they have sexual relations with any woman.

In many traditional Bengali societies, women are often the primary carriers of religious ritual from generation to generation. However, women are not allowed to do their daily prayers after a bath when they are menstruating. Usually, at this time, children or other women of the household who are not menstruating continue the rituals. This becomes problematic when there is a nuclear family and there is no one to continue this daily ritual during menstruation. In some cases, the men conduct the prayers.

Access to household gods becomes very special in the case of the Maithili Brahmins of Mithila district in northern Bihar, where rural household gods are often installed in a locked crypt, with the keys being kept only by the eldest son of the household (or the father, or eldest male), and the prayers are kept secret from all the women as well as from others outside the household.

Blood, especially menstrual blood, seems to be carrying with it a host of unpleasant feelings in society. Blood is symbolic of death, murder, life-giving force or kinship. In many societies women are not allowed to go into the kitchen while menstruating, since their hands would 'pollute' the food served to all others.

In Assam, at the famous religious temple called Kamakhya in Guwahati in June, is the famous *Ambubachi mela* or festival. This religious festival celebrates the fertility of the Kamakhya goddess, by having a three day ritual because at this time the goddess has her annual menstrual cycle. Here the word *Ambu* means 'mother' and *bachhi* means 'seed'. Many mendicants, especially those of the occult or Tantric side, visit the temple and conduct rituals. During these three days the doors of the main temple are closed.

Among the Dogon tribe of Mali in West Africa, a recent study showed that menstrual taboos were strictly followed. The women, belonging to Christian, Islam and a monotheistic indigenous religion were sequestered in menstrual huts. The community had been studied at one time by the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Using this method, women are enjoined to be truthful about the status of their fertility to their husband's families. This reduces the risk of illicit sexual behaviour among women. After the birth of a child, vigilance by family members increases till the resumption of sexual behaviour after menstruation by the husband. Y DNA studies showed mismatches in only about 1.8 per cent of the cases. This refutes the idea that such traditional populations have high rates of cuckoldry. Thus, religious control of sexual behaviour has been very successful in evolution. Thus, sexual behaviour is controlled through social control in the public sphere and the fear of divine or supernatural punishment.

Similar conditions are imposed among the Wogeo in New Guinea, where the woman who is menstruating is given a bowl of curry by the mother and told to lie near the fire. To make her condition known to others she has to wear black or dark brown skirts. She avoids physical contact though she can converse freely. Other people, looking at the colour of her skirt, avoid physical contact with her. She will avoid touching objects in the house and will go and come through a hole in the wall rather than the doorway. She will only visit her own gardens and will cook her own food. She eats with a fork, drinks water with a straw and uses a scratcher to itch.

Thus, the body of the women becomes a site which becomes proscribed and controlled during natural biological events. They are advertised through the woman's body and this body has to endure many rituals, purifications and mortifications during these periods of proscription. The following of these proscriptions become important not only for her immediate family but also for her kin group, lineage, clan or even the whole village. Thus, a whole ideological and mythical background is often overlaid over these controlling practices in order to enforce them as sanctions on women.

Among the Mae Enga of New Guinea, the women live in a separate house beside their husbands with their unmarried daughters and infant sons. The men live in a large house near the women's houses and there is a strong hostility between the sexes. The men believe that every ejaculation decreases their vitality, and thus intercourse was only conducted to beget children and that, too, after magical ceremonies are performed to prevent the men from weakening. After such intercourse, men do not enter their horticultural gardens in case the contact with women harms the crops. Women are then secluded during menstruation. Crops like sweet potato, setaria or crucifer are gendered as being female and these are harvested by the women at night during this period as food. It is believed that eating male foods like taro, ginger or sugarcane would kill her. On the other hand, wives have fewer prohibitions than unmarried women. This could be said to be a protection, since the wives and mothers come from clans which are traditional enemies and thus need to be protected from.

3.5 WOMEN, SOCIETY AND THE BODY

As has already been mentioned in the previous section, women's bodies become the site of a variety of social issues. One of the most important, if not the most visible, signs of this kind is the fact of child-bearing and child-birth among women, which are often taken as marks of legitimacy or otherwise within the society. The Aztecs honoured this idea by reserving one of their heavens for women who died in child-birth or for soldiers who died in battle.

The fact of the impregnation of the woman and her fertility are considered to be of great importance. For the Arapesh, in the Pacific Islands, sexual activity may be directed towards play or it could be a creative act towards the formation of a child. Thus, the father's role is recognised in such societies. After the mother's breasts show discolouration and swelling caused by pregnancy, all sexual activity stops. The mother is then not permitted to eat frogs, bandicoots or coconuts and sago from a holy place. During the birth, the father is usually not present. The blood associated with child-birth is usually considered to be impure so birthing is done outside the village, with the help of other women. After they return to the village, both parents lie with the child, but both are needed to fast, with having water or even a smoke. Small rituals are carried out with the help of the father's brother's wives through the day to aid them in caring for the baby. The father in Arapesh society is endangered by the birth of the first child. Hence, he remains separated for five days, eating food with a spoon, using a stick for scratching himself and keeping away from tobacco. A leaf hut is built near a pool, decorated with red flowers and herbs, and the father lives here. After cleaning his mouth on a white ring given by his sponsor, he goes on to place it at the bottom of the pool. After bathing, he retrieves this ring and returns it to his sponsor. This marks his rite of passage to fatherhood.

These rituals are society's way of giving importance to natural processes and to incorporate religious elements and importance to everyday events. Thus religion mediates the everyday activities of human beings with others as well as with the rest of the natural world. This mediation brings into focus the existing social structure and its attendant differences in the way it treats gender relations. Thus, studying each event in the life cycle underlines an aspect of social relations.

However, not all societies give this kind of importance to the males when it comes to begetting a child. Among the Aborigines of Western Australia, a spirit-child enters the woman to make her pregnant. For the man, the birth of a child is only a social paternity. Food taboos are maintained for the woman since it is believed that what she eats will affect the child. The mother spends no time in confinement at all. Songs are chanted to ease the birth, usually outside the village. The mother and child pair stays away from the father for five days. Further food taboos are observed for a year after birth. The child thus becomes a part of the father's lineage even though there is no strong belief in the father having any role in the birth of the child.

So strong is this difference observed cross-culturally, that anthropologists have devised two different terms to understand the phenomenon. A genitor is the actual or genetic father of the child. Such a father may or may not be acknowledged and recognised. In case the actual father is not recognised, a social father may be appointed which the society recognises as the father (even though the person may not be the genitor). This social father is termed as the pater. In some tribal societies in Sikkim, such a pater may not even live with his wife, and might even have his own family where he is the genitor. Often, in this society, a pater is a respected member of the society, like a school-teacher.

There seems to be enough societies where there is conflict and doubt regarding the paternity of a child. For many this doubt is only clarified through religion. When Azande women become pregnant, their husbands consult oracles to find out the true paternity of the child. Among the Mundugamur, the oracle is consulted to find a suitable midwife for delivery and also to decide where the birth should take place.

Still others believe that children are the reincarnation of the ancestors. This is why the spirits are called upon to preside over the naming of the child among the Oraons of Jharkhand. Two rice grains are placed on water in a bowl. One has the name of an ancestor while the other that of the child. If the two names go well together, it is believed, they will stick together and play with each other on the surface tension of the water. If they do not match, they will be indifferent to each other. If this happens, another ancestral name is selected until the names match. The naming of a child also ensures protection of the ancestor and the qualities of the ancestor also become part of the child. Among the Bemba, the midwife names the ancestor who has returned as the child.

So conflict-ridden is the idea of paternity that different societies have ensured in different ways to get rid of such issues through elaborate sets of rituals. In South America, among some of the Amazonian tribes, there is the concept of the *couvade*. The father sometimes behaves as if he is also pregnant with the child, sometimes even simulating belly aches. He lies in his hammock and undergoes food taboos, refraining from hunting and smoking. The cultural logic claims that the mother provides the child with the body while the father provides the soul. This providing of the soul by the father weakens him as much as pregnancy weakens the mother. If the father does not perform the rituals well, it can affect the further development of the child, it is believed.

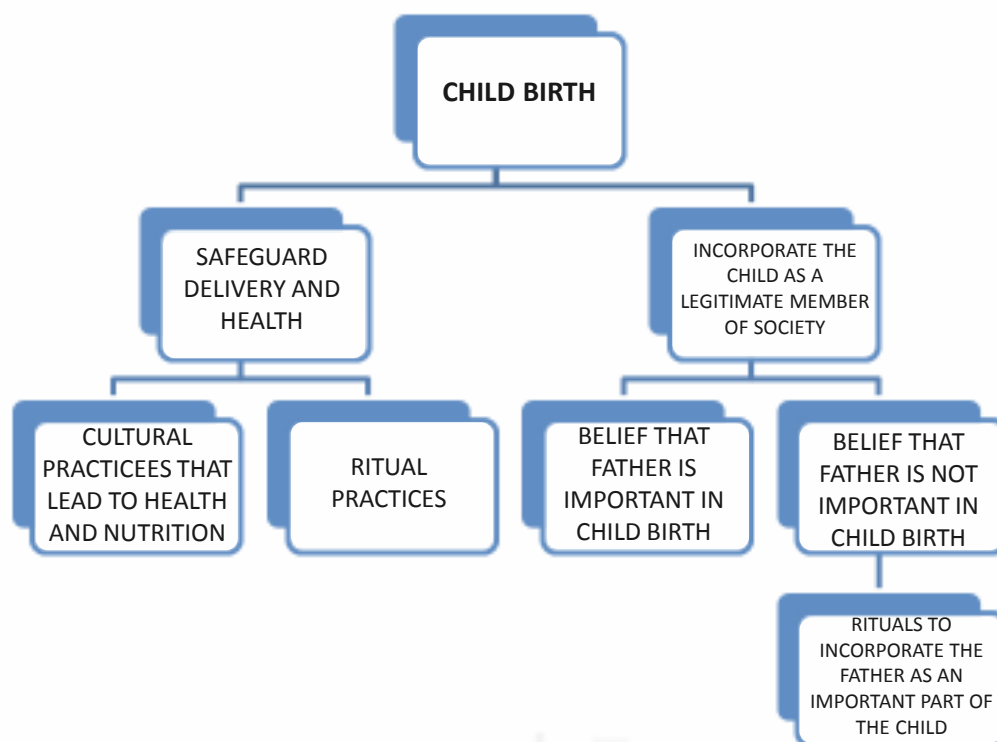


Fig. 3.1: Child Birth and Its Cultural Logic

3.6 GROWING UP IN A SUPERNATURAL WORLD

Supernatural assurance that everything is right in one's behaviour has been a very important component of culture. This has been assured to people through a variety and range of religious specialists. In Bengal, Durga Puja has been an important deity who is prayed to, in order to ensure that women get a good husband. A similar case is seen with the Gauri Puja among the people of Karnataka. In both cases, it is ensured that if the rituals are followed correctly, these wishes would be granted.

The adult woman in culture is definitely supposed to be savvy about everyday religious rituals that need to be performed. This can only be so if the enculturation process has been painstaking and without flaws. One way of clearly highlighting the division of labour in society between the genders is to have a separate house for the men. Among the Oraons of Jharkhand it was called a *dhumkuria*. Among the tribes of Madhya Pradesh in India, many of the villages had a bachelors' dormitory.

Having this kind of a separate structure for the two genders, it was easy to train each gender separately in religious matters also, and keep such matters separate. At such houses, the men met and discussed many things. They were often taught by the elders about rituals, household gods, hunting, and other male activities. They were also trained in sexual matters. Folklore and cultural matters were also picked up through this method of cultural transmission from generation to generation. In Jharkhand, for some years, the Ramakrishna Mission society used the *dhumkuria* to impart cultural knowledge, literacy and training to the youth. The admission to such a house was a matter of honour and prestige. Women were strictly not allowed in such houses. The transgression within or out of such houses was offset by the use of certain religious or supernatural sanctions. Among the Latmul, men would sleep in the men's houses before a hunt in order to separate themselves from contact with women.

The women in societies like that of Manipur, in North-East India, consider their kitchen area to be as private as that of the men's houses. Women meet here in privacy, away from the eyes of men, and gossip, discuss or talk about a variety of affairs. In early households in Manipur, the shared deities in the household were kept in common areas of the house, while others were kept in zones used mostly by one or the other gender. Thus, spatial areas are also demarcated separately for men and for women, with some common areas.

Among the tribals of Jharkhand, like the Oraons and the Mundas, these rules are followed for 15 days to a month of daily fasting by the men of a household during the *manda* festival. The women follow strict rules of purity within the household and while menstruating may not perform their duties during this period. The men eat food which is boiled or roasted before dawn. They then remain hungry through the day. The women, wearing clean clothes after a bath, serve them and then go away to separate quarters. Throughout the event the women serve their men folk (brothers, sons or husbands). On the appointed day, after many privations the men undergo a series of rituals and walk over a bed of coals while their appointed women bathe repeatedly, carry water on their heads to the place of worship where they pour it over an image of Lord Shiva, the presiding deity. After this trial by ordeal, the men and women bathe and eat. They can go on to live normally till the next year. The arena then fills up with the Purulia *Chhau* dancers for a night of folklore and entertainment. Of course, today, there are many more communities who participate in the *manda*. Many of the features of the *manda* are similar to the *jitia* festivals in the hardcore Oraon tribal areas, which was eventually banned by the British because of the wounds seen in hook-swinging. In West Bengal, this same festival becomes the *Charak*. Some of these festivals were also played out in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

What is clear today is that these festivals are part of a *bhakti* movement or revivalist backdrop in the region which perhaps began after about 1000 AD. These trials by ordeal were imposed to show the purity of the acolytes and their belief in these ancient gods. However, the gods here are anti-establishmentarian. On this day, the official priests or Brahmins may not be called and other people may pray directly to the gods without an intermediary. The gods are also supposed to enter into the people, giving them extraordinary powers to bear pain and speed up healing. These healing powers may also be useful to others who stay in contact with them.

Some researchers have found that early prehistoric human societies, which are presumed to have been based on hunting-gathering kind of economy, had female goddesses. Women were supposed to be the centre of the ritual and religious arena of life at that point of time. As society moved on to pastoralist economies involving the husbandry of captive animals for fuel, food and fodder and on to a more Neolithic and agricultural economy, the society shifted to a more strongly patriarchal one. As a result, the emphasis shifted from female deities to male ones. Archaeological sites in the Deccan region seem to show this shift. It has been argued that men needed to clear plots for cultivation and this brought them into closer proximity with their neighbours with whom they often fought. Since only the men fought therefore it made sense to give men such jobs, since they were more expendable as compared to the women who were more important for giving birth to and rearing children. The factors are so complex that merely looking at subsistence issues does not give us the right information regarding

the status of women. Many other factors leading from their position in other subsystems like politics, health and economy are necessary. It seems clear that women's status in a society may be higher when she not only contributes to subsistence but also retains control over the wealth and its produce.

The education and enculturation of a woman in society, as compared to a man, is not only quantitatively different but also qualitatively different. Puberty rituals for men as well as women differ across cultures. Sometimes both are present. Some cultures only have rituals for men while others have them for women. These rituals follow Van Gennep's idea that rites of passage from one stage of life to another have three stages – isolation, education and re-entry into society.

So, people are first isolated from others while they are being readied. They may face ordeals during this period. After this, they are educated so that they are able to enter into the next phase of their lives. There is a feeling of limbo during this transitional period, when the people have been removed from one stage but have not yet been able to enter the next stage. Victor Turner calls it a liminal period. Education regarding the next phase of life as well as the education of the persons close to the person is key towards re-incorporation into the society. These issues are markedly seen during childbirth, puberty, marriage and death rituals. After this period is over, the person is then reincorporated back into society with a new status and its corresponding role-sets.

Among the Wogeo of New Guinea, described by Ian Hogbin in 1970, initiation and puberty rites occur over a period of years. At the age of four or five year's men enter the room where the young boy is hiding with his mother and he is grabbed and taken outside. His eyes are blindfolded and loud sounds are made. He is told that monsters are attacking him. The child then has the lobe and the top of the ears pierced with a bone. They return to the mothers and the other men light a fire to cook and eat the offerings. At the age of ten years, parents apply red ochre on their bodies and they are then taken to the clubhouse. The sponsor descends the stairs, removes the mother and slaps the boy's shoulders to remove the influence of the mother. He is taken in and sleeps there with the men. Some of the men paint their bodies and make grotesque sounds that send the boys into a state of fear. The boys are dragged to the beach, to see and hear the flutes played. The sponsor takes the boy into the sea for a scrubbing. Ankles and wrists of the boys are pulled while relatives twist spear blades into the hair to make the boys grow tall. After coming back to the clubhouse, the boys are told that all the sounds they had heard were made by men, not by monsters and this and other mysteries taught to them should not be revealed to the women. Once the boy is ready for sexual intercourse, the third stage begins with the tongue being scarified to help him to play the flutes. This is symbolically likened to the boy's first menstruation, from which Hogbin calls his book, *The Island of Menstruating Men*. The tongue is the part where the mother's influence is most apparent – through nursing and eating food prepared by her. The tongue is scraped with rough leaves till it bleeds. Before marriage, the man is bathed in the sea, pulled to the shore by a spear in his hair and then this hair is confined in a wicker cone. This cone is replaced with bigger ones till the hair is about ten inches long at which time it is trimmed to fit the cone. From this time on, the person is considered fit to be an adult.

In some societies, people from a closely similar age group are put together into an age-set or an age-grade (as mentioned earlier). Each age-set group works together to learn what is required in order to be qualified for the next stage. Each stage is usually occupied by its own rites of passage rituals. After the eldest age-group is constituted, the group of elders then becomes the most knowledgeable with regard to religious and ritual knowledge.

One set of theories about puberty rituals claims that there is no critical biological marker for the transition of men from childhood to adulthood as exists among women. This is why men rather than women have more puberty rituals. Also, men separate rituals, knowledge and religious matters from the women using this set of behaviour. It has also been noted that female puberty rituals occur in areas where women do not leave home after marriage, as in matrilineal societies, or in areas where women have control over economic resources. Thus such rituals are necessary in areas where the person has been born and is likely to spend all her life, thus necessitating clear ways to show a change in status.

Most anthropologists have been male and thus such rituals pertaining to women have been rare. One of these accounts has been by Audrey Richards among the Bemba of Africa who described the Chisungu rite in 1956. The ritual is performed for a group and the bridegroom may pay the mistress of ceremonies since without this performance the marriage cannot take place. Girls learn the tricks of being an adult like carrying sticks and learning dance forms, making models of hoes and pots, learning about conduct like not mentioning the husband's adulterous liaisons, about taking care of babies, not to gossip, not to be lazy, and so on. On the seventh day the women are trained to serve a basket of seeds to the older women. On the tenth day the tree of fertility festooned with white beads is the centre of activity. The beads are bitten off and given to the mistress of ceremonies. Clay models made and decorated by the girls are presented to her. After seventeen days, the bridegroom enters the house. The bridegroom shoots an arrow above the head of the girl, and then she is presented with a bundle of firewood, meat, beads and red dye. The latter two are used to dress up the girl as she sits beside the bridegroom and then she receives gifts of coins and bracelets from their kin. On the eighteenth day, she kills, plucks and cooks a chicken porridge for a communal feast.

The dramatic nature of such rituals is important when the solidarity of the group members is high. There is thus much cooperation between the members. Using such ritual methods, the boy can be quickly and systematically incorporated into the group of men. In corporate kin societies, women learn through this ritual to incorporate their activities with a tightly organised group. This prepares her for the time when they will move on to another household after marriage. It trains her to maintain her own autonomy while keeping track of the cooperative group. Thus, men's ceremonies prepare them for the public sphere while women's ceremonies prepare them for the private sphere. Men's ceremonies often regularly exclude women, while women's ceremonies keep implicit the idea that men are a part of their world.

3.7 THE MATURE WOMAN AS THE REPOSITORY OF CULTURE

Thus, the woman goes through a series of stages of learning all through her life that prepares her to become knowledgeable about the religious and ritual aspects of life. In some societies women can access some degree of control over her circumstances. This may be true to a large extent in matrilineal societies, like among the Garos, Jaintias and the Khasis, where the women do a large amount of economic activities for the household as well as retaining control over much of it. In polygamous societies, like the Tiv studied by Paul Bohannon, women may control the bride price to get successive wives or daughters-in-law. In other matrifocal societies women may improve their status by manipulating kin relations. In modern urban societies, women can improve their status by choosing their own mates and affines. Also, ritual and religious rules govern sexuality, so if the beliefs of the society do not give her a higher status than the other subsystems of society will also contribute to this effect. The reverse is also true, if the woman's work is seen to be insignificant, she will also be given a lower status by the belief system.

Older women are often more easily allowed to vent their opinions and be present in the public sphere than their younger counterparts. Such women are often consulted by others, including men, on a variety of issues.

Religion may also be used as a method for venting out anger, frustration and other feelings of angst against specific people or the society at large. This may be done through being in a state of trance caused by extreme excitement and fervor at a religious event. I.M. Lewis studied such phenomena from around the world to show that whenever a particular social group was oppressed and had no voice within the society, such events were likely to be present. Thus, men and women were particularly prone to such trances. However, his data showed that only a few cases existed where men were involved whereas a large number of cases involved women, showing that women were one of the most oppressed groups in society. Trances involved the woman beginning by shaking her head violently from side to side and then making sounds or cries, which may be followed by long tirades or comments on people or society. People often listen carefully to understand her and see if her words foretell anything since it is believed that spirits or gods enter the body at this time. The woman may faint after this. At most religious shrines with a high degree of excitement, such events are common.

This is an important event for the woman since she is given much importance by society and her family during this period. She is also not censured for her behaviour during this time since she seems to have no memory of the event later and the gods seem to have caused this event. Overall, due to this event she becomes an important person of some standing in society if she has these fits and can control them sufficiently to use them intelligently. Further, she may do or say things that people would listen to as being the voice of the gods and their will. These instructions may then be followed by others, thus creating a better environment for the woman to live within.

In many households, some older people have also taken the lead in advising their children about the need for equality, especially with respect to religion. In

many areas, change of religion has often been brought about through the action of wives and daughters rather than by the men of the household.

Anthropologists feel that society in the South Asian region has been patrilineal, matrilineal or bilateral. Each has its own ideas which have led to differing statuses of women within them. Among the Thais, the spirits of the domestic sphere are prayed to and cared for by the women. Overall, it may be seen that though people may follow a major religion or even animism, they still adhere to the customary laws of the community related to their relations with divinity and with regard to kin relations, though bilateral relations seem to be more egalitarian than others.

3.8 SOCIAL CHANGE, RELIGION AND WOMEN

Having seen the variety of experiences of a woman with respect to religion over the life cycle, it will be understood that such religious behaviour permeates into the rest of society quickly, quietly and without much fanfare. Women-headed changes of such kind are likely to be quicker and painless than other kinds of change. However, media thinking regarding the role of women as religious specialists is yet to change – something which many cult groups understood a long time ago.

In many cases women have been known to refuse to change, since affecting such a large amount of change physically as well as psychologically are beyond the scope of many. In patrilineal societies, the insecurity caused by translocation to the husband's house has led women to become singularly wary of creating permanency in their jobs, living areas, politics, ideologies and sometimes even belief systems.

Many of the accepted areas of operation for women were in conflict during the World Wars when women had to take on jobs usually for men because there was a shortage of men. This has also been true of women-headed households. Many of the families understand that due to current-day economic pressures, the men would need to go off to work. This would leave the women, especially in India, whether married or not, to look after their ageing parents. Such parents are often also seeing their single girl children as being the only suitable person for imparting religious or ritual information that used to be traditionally only imparted to the sons. This practicality has changed the outlook of many people, especially in urban areas. It has also changed the ideas of some in rural areas. However, in rural areas, the attendant subsystems of the society do not support such changes as yet. This can be seen in the violent reaction against any change in early systems by the traditional political system (for example, the *khaps* in Haryana).

Changes in the global arena have also necessitated changes in this kind of thinking. Among the travelled urban population, the switching of male and female roles has become commonplace. This has also reflected on the practices within the religious institutions and the religious practitioners. Earlier, shamans and exorcists in communities were usually male and witchcraft was considered to be evil as among the Badaga, Kurumba, Oraon and Munda tribes. Today, female priests are being tentatively accepted. In many households women are managing and praying to household gods while their men are away. Women in England practice witchcraft openly, using a variety of rituals and religious paraphernalia. They have their own closed societies, some of which are very well known. India also has its share of such witches as in the case of Ipsita Roy.

In urban areas as well as in rural ones, a variety of gender roles are now being experimented with. Such behaviours are being identified with local names. Some members of the families are beginning to accept these behaviours as being normal also. The media has been playing an eventful role by highlighting these issues and thus sensitising the public to such issues. Though much remains to be done, the sexual mores and behaviours of this gradually increasing set of genders (sometimes called LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite) have been given a platform through programmes that attempted to deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS in many areas.

In urban areas the idea of the metrosexual man, among other things, brought in the element of males having a feminine side to their lives also. This has not been unusual even in traditional societies. In early American communities, the concept of the *berdache* was well-known. In such societies men had a strong patrilineal and patriarchal ideology, with men going off for hunting while the women stitched clothes, cooked, sewed and looked after the children. Some men who would prefer to follow the home-making way of life were called *berdache*. They were respected members of society and could remain home, look after the children, sew and cook without feeling any disrespect.

At present more and more women are entering the public sphere. They are also entering into the issues that were earlier covered by men. From becoming the priests of some temple gods to ordained priests at a church, they are now beginning to take control of the religious sphere. For many years now, women have been using marginal cults to sustain the memory of the minor female deities in homes and through networks. Now these deities are coming into their own, gaining supporters and temples from being just merely sideshows. Perhaps all these show the background being created to ensure that women have a better status in current society.

Even as women control their biology to delay childbirth and use new reproductive technologies, they also become a large majority who take on devoutness and religiosity through pilgrimages and religious work at a later age, when work pressures or family commitments are less. While the strong patriarchal areas are still putting up a fight, there are many who find such changing systems to be better for them and much less stressful in society. Education and new forms of cohabitation, compromise and understanding are ensuring that the track to future changes are being laid in the present for stronger-willed women who have controlling interests in all of the areas earlier occupied by men. Using traditional family structures for support in these changes is also another way of gaining access to egalitarianism. These new areas will require more stresses from the genders and more demands on their time. While universities are becoming more flexible to such time limits, jobs are also trying to find ways to adjust by using methods like flexi-time, where the person uses the time schedules most suited to them. By cohabiting with a large workforce of women over time, by harnessing their conjoint minds to the problem, by sharing in their efforts and by empathising with them, society is likely to find new ways of dealing with these changes and new challenges to combat together.

However, before all things seem too rosy, it must be understood that the same attendant dangers that were seen among men are likely to be seen among women when it comes to control over religious matters. This is the issue of religious

intolerance and fundamentalism, for which new modes of rethinking and new ideas are required for coexistence and cohabitation between people with radical and changing belief systems.

3.9 SUMMARY

To summarise, this unit attempts to view gender roles observed in religion through anthropological documentation. This is supported by various anthropological theories, approaches and methods. This presents a comprehensive world view which helps us to know about women's behaviour and connection with rituals and religiosity and how they are shaped. The basic factors for such roles and norms assigned to women are formed from the household, enculturation and socialisation processes. These roles, in this case religious activities, originate within the family, and then are extended to the kins and finally to the entire society. The unit shows through examples, how women grow up creating and placing themselves in a fantastical reality made up of the supernatural world which includes deities, sacred bodies, images and places. Rituals of course play a big part in all these. The unit further exhibits that elderly women have important roles to play in the religiousness of a society and their knowledge of the supernatural, spiritual, mystical and rituals. They are the ones who carry this forward from one generation to the next. The unit ends with changes occurring in society and how in it women are also working towards gaining better options, in terms of religion or otherwise.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the importance of religion in shaping gender relations.
- 2) Trace the theoretical development in this area (gender and religion) of study.
- 3) Discuss the positive and the negative role religion play in women's lives.



UNIT 4 EDUCATION AND GENDER

Contents

- 4.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 Historical Background
 - 4.2.1 World, at a Glance
 - 4.2.2 Women's Education in the Subcontinent
 - 4.3 Education and Gender
 - 4.3.1 Gender-Education Connect
 - 4.3.2 Women, Gift and Incest
 - 4.4 Gender Gap in Educational Access: Reasons and Implications
 - 4.4.1 The Existing Gap in Educational Access and Attainment
 - 4.4.2 Out-of-school Reasons for the Gap
 - 4.5 Gendered Education: Schools as Sites of Gender Socialisation
 - 4.5.1 Gendered Environment at School
 - 4.5.2 Gendered Attitudes
 - 4.5.3 Gendered Educational Experience
 - 4.5.5 Gendered Choices
 - 4.5.6 Implications
 - 4.6 Way Ahead: Re-evaluation and Re-examination
 - 4.7 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand historical, social context of women's education;
- comprehend the inter-linkages between gender and education;
- identify the educational reality resulting from the restrictions produced through these inter-linkages; and
- critically evaluate how these inter-linkages operate towards discrimination and exclusion of women.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the inter-linkage between gender and education. It looks at the historic evolution of educational concerns for women on the world scene as well as concerns of women's education as understood by the feminist scholars in India. The unit intends to highlight the socio-political and cultural context within which gender concerns feature in educational reality and educational experience, for women. Before we move ahead, we must understand that gender, in educational context must not be understood as a social constraint, solely, relegating

individuals as passive recipients but as performative in its essential characteristic, that is, it must be understood through. In essence, gender must be understood within the discourse of 'doing gender', such conceptualisation not only respects the agency individuals may exercise towards social change but also understands social processes as a more dynamic process evolving through participation between society, and individuals.

Before proceeding, we must understand, through conceptual engagement, how gender and education link-up.

Conceptually when we talk about doing gender what we mean, in effect, is how we actively construct and positively reinforce gendered expectations, consciously or unconsciously. As children we quickly learn the differentiation between sex categories (women and men) and actively engage with these existing set of symbols and meanings as a matter of developing a sense of self and belongingness. 'Doing gender' is intimately linked to power dynamics within the specific socio-cultural contexts. It would be wrong to assume that within this framework of power, women are oppressed and exploited. The operation of power dynamics has to be understood a little more broadly in two aspects. One, that the system reinforces and rewards conformity to gendered codes by giving power, that is, women by conforming to gendered expectations find themselves rewarded with access (even though unequal) to resources and other perks that it denies if women refuse or fail to conform to expectations, sometimes very violently. Second, the system is still an oppressive system because it restricts socio-political, economic, aesthetic choices that we may want, for instance, even if a boy wants to choose to be a home-maker, instead of earning a living the system is most contriving for making a desired choice, which may flout gendered-role expectations.

Education, works towards establishing and reinforcing gendered role expectations through various ways. It reflects the socio-cultural ideas of gendered identity for both men and women and socialises, effectively, through various means, the young into accepting, respecting, and conforming to these expectations. Education is in this way fed by, and feeds into the existing gender-disparate and restrictive-oppressive ideas of the society.

At another level, education has the potential to question and through initiating a critical enquiry, engage with existing gender disparity. It holds the potential to act as a trigger towards social change and inclusion through critical engagement, economic empowerment, and socio-political representation.

In Indian context gender inequality is related to patriarchy as an oppressive socio-cultural and historical system. Patriarchy is understood through systematic assignment of power to men over women, a systematic and cultural de-valuation of women (holding women as inferior, assigning them secondary status and lesser value than men). The system is seen as defining and enforcing different roles and behavioural codes as well as expectations from men and women. Although the roles underestimate women's potentials, limits their choices and restricts the possibilities of life; it is simultaneously seen as oppressive for men, through its unreasonable ambitious demands and strict expectations of behavioural conduct. For instance, earning livelihood is seen as an essential part of being a man, through association of earning livelihood to the roles of bread earner/provider and thus 'master'. It becomes a matter of agony, self doubt and a feeling of inferiority,

rage and frustration when men may not find themselves fulfilling the criteria. At the same point of time, it becomes a matter of shame and social backlash for men who may want to choose the role of a home-maker. Thus, in essence strict gender roles and behavioural expectations are restrictive and oppressive for both men as well as women.

The sex as biological fact and gender as cultural and social construct draws from the works of Gayle Rubin and others who furthered the argument and drew from the works of Marcel Mauss on gift societies and Claude Levi-Strauss's work on incest and taboo to explain the related phenomena of devaluation of women in these societies.

In the following sections you will see how this devaluation comes to play a significant role in determining choices and shaping experiences of women. This understanding of devaluation of women would also help us understand the educational reality in Indian context and the restricted progress we have made with respect to correcting gender imbalance in national educational scenario.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.2.1 World at a Glance

Critique of gendered inaccessibility; and nature of education for women as a gender category has a matter of quest towards educational and social justice. It has been one of the important concerns in the struggle waged by the feminist scholarship and women's movement on the world scene and in India respectively.

However, owing to differences in specific contexts, the demand for educational access and equity rose in very different ways in western civilisations as opposed to its rise in Indian contexts. When we talk about western contexts it must be understood that initial feminist scholarship demanding educational access and equity, comprised of predominantly white women, from middle class, and it must be borne clear that this scholarship could not be seen as representative of the whole western context, given that specific representation of groups of women led to subsequent evolution of constitutional provisions and socio-cultural preconditions and support for different groups of women as per their emergence and assertion for a specific differential consideration by them. These included groups like women of African-American descent, indigenous tribal women, and immigrant women and so on and so forth.

Ancient mentions of a university open to women for learning, in Islamic historical accounts goes as long back as 1859. There have been references to women's education and leadership in educational institutions and ventures, in Islamic historical accounts dating as long back as 1859. 12th and 13th century (Ayyubid Dynasty predominantly in regions that form present-day Arabic nations) records have noted women's participation in public education, funded by women, sometimes. However, women's education was not absolutely accepted and approved of. Just as historical as the accounts of women's education, is the accounts of its disapproval. Women's education faced stern resistance, but continued to exist nonetheless.

The present day European region, historical accounts of Roman empire noted women's education, although restricted to upper class women of a centurion (professional officer in Roman army in 107 BC). Wall painting of Pompeii (present day Italy) also picture present women in literary gear.

Through 13th, 14th and 15th century have mentions of women's education for only the most advantaged sections of the society, and even these remain rather patchy. Concerns about women's learning were expressed dominantly and restriction had begun being levied, in the light of increasing control being slowly but steadily shifting in the hands of the religious authorities, along with consolidation of states and formulation and re-formulation of laws for civil society.

Education for women was rare and isolated, with increasing participation of; and control by a compact nexus of state, law and religion dominated by religious authorities, Education of women kept being strictly withheld from expanding from its atomistic existence. Later part of 18th century saw concerns for women's education being raised by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) rising in the wake of The Enlightenment, and yet education for larger populations of women, education remained far from reach and imagination. In 19th century, women in higher education were ghostly, which can be understood through the very fact that Marie S. Curie (1867-1934) attained education from *flying universities* in Poland (lacking any established institutional space and constantly on-the-move to avoid being attacked or busted and arrested by authorities).

The outreach (as seen above) of education, in every historical account has always been debatable, since most accounts refer to women from advantaged social groups being initiated into education. The accounts refer to glorious but isolated, sporadic and contained phenomena of women's education, weather Islamic, ancient Europe, or ancient India, which makes it evident that education was luxury that only a selected population enjoyed access to.

The mass-reach of education to women wouldn't feature in western world up until mid-19th century, when a number of single-sex colleges began to offer education to women. Access ensured the struggle began to take account of other kinds of marginalisation and gender stereotyping of women and their educational experiences.

4.2.2 Women's Education in the Subcontinent

In Indian context, women's education exhibited the characteristic features of the scene of women's education on the world as a whole. The literary knowledge of women, in vedic ages celebrated through evoking highly isolated instances of celebrated priestesses and/or scholars were not representative of the larger social scenario. Interesting in all of these accounts however, is the clear expression of the kind of resistance, opposition and marginalisation women faced on account of being learned. (In a heated philosophical debate and deliberation, faced with a lack of appropriate answers to her questions Yajnavalkya threatens Gargi, against her speaking further, with dire consequences, Romsha, Lopamudra, Maitreyee etc are other featured as scholars in vedic texts). Another interesting point to be noted is that from amongst about 1000 hymns composed in rig veda alone, only about 27 are authored and credited to women scholars. These women form distinct examples that were not representative of women at large.

Stronghold of caste system ensured education of any kind was restricted to the reach, predominantly, of men of a certain caste group. The distinction being so stark that even the languages of communication differed for masses as against the literary caste group(s) enjoying access to written texts. Although, parallel traditions of education operated, they remained largely marginalised. Literature, history and other knowledge systems, relevant to dominated caste groups were preserved through alternative ways. How the educational access and experience of women belonging to specific caste groups differed, is a curious field of study. Although women remained marginalised by virtue of their caste group identity, it is often argued that the restrictions, faced by women on mobility and sexuality and life choices, were relatively lower in comparison to women from more advantaged caste groups. However, the social prejudices and social attitudes translated this freedom into exploitation of these women for labour and sexuality. Social position in the caste hierarchy continued to marginalise Dalit women, strictly against accessing education, since they were situated at the lowest matrix of gender and caste.

On a whole, the society, in sub-continent nonetheless, treated women as inferior, secondary subjects and thus men found themselves almost predominantly in a more advantageous position when it came to accessing any kind of knowledge.

The coming of imperial control and the consolidation of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (of today) into one colony, led to some significant changes with the challenging change initiated by the new discourse on women's education and status in the colony.

Access to public institutions of education emerged as a need in the backdrop of Imperialism against nationalist discourses. The development is best understood as disjointed, and faintly related. The specific contexts of different and starkly diverse regions within the administrative unit unified in the name of India were too distinct to be read in a continuum.

The stark differences can be understood through a quick skimming at the specifics of eastern regions of the subcontinent. This is geared towards highlighting that there existed specific and distinct manifestation yet a rather cohesive trend in women's education in the sub-continent.

Bengal (undivided) had witnessed the advent of Buddhism much later than the other parts of the subcontinent. By the time, Buddhism had entered Bengal in 16th century, much later than its 12th 13th century onwards culmination in the rest of the sub-continent. Thus, the social texture of the society was still experiencing a questioning of social hierarchies and power relations, while the rest of the sub-continent experienced reinstating of old hierarchical structures. Buddhism had done the necessary tilling, towards women's education, in Bengal something that helped towards women's accessing education faster, and more enthusiastically than any other part of the sub-continent. Southard notes in her paper that women's education in Bengal before the advent of 20th century was led by men, owing to negligible number of educated women in the society.

It is important to note, that the enthusiasm of men towards educating women was embedded within a discourse of nationalism. Women's education and social position and status became the bone of contention being the social status of women. Missionary/academic/administrative accounts at this point were arguing

in favour of the colonial regime as initiation of civilisation into an uncivilised region. The accounts pointed to the 'barbaric' social condition of women. In reaction, it caused the rise of reactionaries and revivalists. While revivalists celebrated the golden age and sought to go back to the historical legacy, arguing women were respected in a culturally specific way that westerners wouldn't be able to understand. The Reformists, mostly western educated, advocated education for women, along the idea proposed western education. A group within reformists suggested education of women must be at par with men. However, there was not unanimous agreement with respect to the nature of education that must be provided to women. Reformists, started schools, and colleges for women and encouraged their own women and other interested women to study.

There, however was disunity within reformists with regard to the nature of education that must be made available. This marked the larger trend seen across the subcontinent. Although, the western regions rose much later to the educational developments for women made by their eastern counterparts, the foundational contention was experienced by the entire subcontinent.

Since women's education rose embedded in a nationalistic discourse, it is highly unlikely that for a considerable part of the history of educational developments for women, women's welfare or education for its own sake was the actual intention.

The colonial administration remained largely un-interested in funding women's education. Female education depended much on non-governmental funding sources in the early years.

Historians noted that surpassing initial hic-cups of women's accessing education were difficult, and even when women began accessing education what they studied became a political issue.

Most initially, while it became fashionable for elite women to get educated, the only purpose of education was to make them eligible as smart and intelligent companions to their progressive husbands. The education was tailored to appreciate their roles as wives without challenging the dominant gender roles expectations. Fashionable, as it was for the women belonging to elite sections of society, given the restriction of purdah, only women from less-advantaged sections of society accessed reformist interventions in public education, first. And yet, however, the higher education was usually off limits, irrespective of the social standing.

The matter of education was another contentious issue, with most nationalist leaders convinced that education of women should and must not be allowed to interfere with their gendered roles as wives and daughters, in fact, it was argued that education of women must be geared towards helping them in performing their expected roles as house-keepers and mothers and wives with greater efficiency. Thus, education even though allowed for women remained rather unchallenging of the social status quo and the gendered hierarchy.

Sardar Dayal Singh, speaking on behalf of the Indian Association of Punjab, stated "the object of female education in this country is not to make sound scholars but to make better mothers, sisters and wives".

Girls should be taught suitable subjects and “not be made to swallow history and geography indiscriminately”, opined Lahore Arya Samaj.

Up until 1920, the participation of Indian Christians and Parsis was much higher than that of Hindus, and it was the lowest among Muslims, It still remains somewhat skewed.

4.3 EDUCATION AND GENDER

The key to understanding the access to education and subsequent educational experience of women in India, is to understand the cultural-religious view of women, the culturally specific gender role expectations communicated through Biological Differences, Structural Constraints, Social Interaction, Socio-cultural Reproduction or Gender Socialisation and Gender Schemas. All the various theories parallel existed, gained and lost significance owing to numerous factors.

It is important to understand that no theory can be claimed to have vanished or completely rejected as obsolete. The tenets of these theories surface and re-surface in various aspects of educational praxis, however their legitimacy at explaining the relationship must be subjected to critical evaluation and analysis. A plethora of studies and researches (primarily gaining importance and popular support) attributed differential educational representation in educational representation and educational choices on the basis of natural-sexual differences. Biological differences gained respect and legitimacy from traditional religious-cultural thoughts that influenced studies, which in turn drew from scientific evidences motivated by the same religious-cultural assumptions about women and men’s differential abilities as an attribute of their biological differences. Erik Erickson’s work (1970-80) is significant in arguing biological basis as determinant of differential developmental projectiles and abilities.

Meanwhile, early liberal Feminist thought, arguing against any significant biological differences beyond those of procreation, actively sought through studies to either discount gender specific differences in educational talents and abilities (Nihilen, 1975), or, made an overzealous attempt to prove the supremacy of one sex over the other (Draper,1975) . The studies and findings within this stream of thought came under scrutiny on the basis of biological essentialism and rejection of the role of environmental constraints.

Box 4.2

Gender Schema Theory: Gender schemas refer to the system of symbols that are imbibed and assimilated by an individual to develop an understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Schemata or network of information pertaining to gendered identity are established and reinforced by the society. The cognition of an individual interacts with these schemas and constructs the knowledge about this system of information to attempt and acquire the essential schemata

With the increased fervor of Socialist and Radical Feminist thought, studies and researches shifted focus to structural constraints as explanatory of differences in educational attainment and choices. This stream of thought focused on the role of environment as constraining the educational ability, expression and educational representation. This stream asserted ways in which gender roles interact with

social institutions, structures, and processes and how human groups use gender to organise roles, statuses, norms, and values. It examined the ways in which institutions of family, schools socialise gender appropriate behaviour and role-expectations. Goetz and Grant (1988) observe,

“Shalinsky’s (1980) examination of the acquisition of gender identities in Afghanistan, for example, focuses on how family structure perpetuates gender roles across generations. Because girls’ education resides in the family, especially with the mother, Shalinsky suggests that the strength of the mother-daughter bond assures social replication across generations. This continues the earlier focus on social structures as the locus of traditional roles and expectations. Dobbert (1975), for example, had observed that in school boys are assigned manipulative jobs while girls are given nurturant tasks. This complementary division is reinforced by boys’ being encouraged to lead and act, whereas girls are encouraged to follow and watch.”

Structural constraints assert unadulterated perpetuation of gender roles through socialisation. However, socialisation is not absolute, complete and unadulterated. Socialisation does not reproduce exact gender dynamics, however, the socialisation theories fail to account or respect human agency. Gender socialisation theory assumed a certain amount of passivity among women and men in their identity formation. It examined and illuminated the various ways through which a culture of gender identity precedes an individual’s existence and determines roles and behaviour for the individual. Socialisation theories suggest, sex-typing or assigning meaning to a person by virtue of their sexual identity begins very early on, in and through family. School becomes the second greatest locale of influence. Education thus consolidates the individual experiences of young children and ascribes meaning to it, towards formation of the sex-category identity.

The next significant development that happened was the coming of Gender Schema Theory that included human agency as well as structural stimuli towards shaping of experiences. Social interactions gained importance. Gender Schema Theory draws from the constructivist paradigm of psychology and asserts that sex typing derives in part, from gender based schematic processing, much in line with the general information processing that human mind entails as a part of growing up. The theory suggests that sex typing is resultant of the fact that self-concept itself gets assimilated to the gender schema. It draws heavily from constructivist idea of information processing done by an individual through active engagement with the stimuli provided by the environment.

The elements of all the above threads of feminist thought get reflected in part or whole in various aspects of educational praxis and policy in Indian context, which we shall see, in forthcoming sections.

4.3.1 Gender-Education Connect

Education connects with gender prejudices prevalent in a society through various ways. It usually performs a number of functions to establishment and reinforcement of the existing sex-typing and gender socialisation (Box 1.). This work inter-connectively and in a mutual manner as follows:

- 1) Education becomes a tool for perpetuation through implicit or explicit gender socialisation through textbooks. For example, a number of studies have revealed that school textbooks, in many cases, project women characters as

passive, docile, emotionally vulnerable, fickle minded, and incapable of leadership, while observing that women are usually assigned roles that are nurturing, caring, and motherly.

- 2) Educational experiences, given largely gender-uncritical nature of school teachers, who carry with themselves to school, the larger socio-cultural perception of girls, boys, their talents and abilities, which shapes their perceptions and attitudes towards students respectively. This then influences their expectations, the efforts they put in and also the self concept among both boys and girls.
- 3) The lack of role models, support and reinforcements for women make it challenging for women, to perform at par, or even sustain themselves in a system that does not support or reinforce women's participation.
- 4) The gender-role attitudes and expectations that women face in their lives outside educational institutions impose restrictions on educational goal-aspirations, attainments, performance, in effect influencing women's educational experiences.
- 5) The Socio-cultural and religious meaning assigned to being a member of sex-category of women, also imposes restrictions on the educational resources (investment of time, money, mentoring, help, care and effort), choices and possibilities made available to women.

Thus systemic constraints impose restrictions that women actively engage with and constantly negotiate with in order to advance educationally.

4.3.2 Women, Gift and Incest

To understand the other forms of manifestation one must begin the analysis with the understanding of socio-cultural devaluation of women in the Indian society, broadly. The analysis that helps in this regard is the analysis of two major theorists of anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss.

Combining their works on incest taboo and gift society respectively we can understand the kind of anxiousness society has about women's unsupervised mobility and freedom. Education can easily be seen as a tool for freedom of expression and thinking, and thus, it may come to challenge or inspire a critical reflection of women of their own lives. Together, they constitute the rationale of women's devaluation. Elaborate incest taboo (rules governing possible networks of socially permissible sexual relationships) viewed women as a valued gift that is promised and exchanged between men of specific social groups, as a mark of the mutual relationship between specific groups. Exchange happens against the backdrop of a greater feeling of solidarity between various groups and clans and as a symbol representing their utmost regard and respect for this solidarity and as a token to convey allegiance towards their own group. The grandeur marking marriages are a way of celebrating the upholding of this solidarity and its public declaration and reinforcement.

In larger parts of India, fathers give away their daughters, although, as you may have read there are alternate kinship patterns assigning this power to different men of the family, for instance, it could be maternal uncle or brother.

Thus, there is anxiety and strictness surrounding women's mobility and sexuality, especially. Since the incest taboo is very elaborate and works through complex networks there is a stronger sense of restrictions on women. Further, as in most cases, in larger Indian social scenario, with marginal variation, there is a hierarchy between wife-givers and wife-takers, with the reigning belief that wife givers are socially inferior to the wife takers. This rule translates into giving of dowry, the anxiety against having a girl child, as a matter of loss of social power, and thus, leading to sex-selective termination of pregnancy and infanticide.

The woman since is seen as a valuable gift, she's perceived as owned by her husband and since women serve a specific purpose in family setup and society at large, through their exchangeability in marriage, as an adhesive to hold social bonds together, marriages gain superimposing consideration in the bringing up and socialisation of a girl child. Women are barely appreciated as an independent individual by herself or even allowed to develop herself into an individual, individuated and independent. Women are initiated into values of relations and associations, socialised towards developing a sense of embedded selves (in relation to everyone, and keeping herself last). Passivity, nurturance, obedience, meekness are thus the values seen as coherent with the larger understanding of women's role in society and thus they're aptly socialised. The choices, investments and attitudes pertaining to women, reflect the view of consideration of their eventual marriage and their successful exchange.

It is important, however, to remember that education must be envisioned as a longitudinal social project that must be geared towards addressing the historical wrong done on various historically disadvantaged groups, women being one such group. Education must be seen as an empowerment project that works in view of long term benefits instead of only short term returns. Thus, when we discuss how education must make not just re-evaluation to redress the prejudices carried forth, historically but also re-adjust itself to ensure that women, as a group be judged against the backdrop of a long history of exclusion, discrimination, subjugation and oppression; and be given special consideration for inclusion in the reaping of returns from education.

4.4 GENDER GAP IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS: REASONS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.4.1 The Existing Gap in Educational Access and Attainment

There has been an overall increase in literacy rate of the country from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% in 2001. Female literacy during this period has shown an optimistic growth of 14.87% as opposed to the 11.72% growth in male literacy, in the period of 1991-2001, a comparative high of 3.15%. However, this must be seen in relation to the overall rise in population in the country.

India however, has the worst female literacy rate, with only about half its entire female population, up to the age of 7 years, literate, a total of 53.67%. The differences in female literacy rates among the states are also extreme with Kerala having the highest female literacy rate of 87.72%, followed by Mizoram (86.75%). A contrast emerges from the picture provided by other states that have female literacy rates as low as 33.12% in Bihar and 38.87% in Jharkhand.

An interesting picture is presented by the dropout rates of the girl students at various levels. In 2005-2006, drop rate at primary level of boys was 28.53 % as against 21.54% of girls. At the secondary level, it amounted to 60.04% for boys and 63.56% for girls. The spatial variation in dropout rates for girls was stark. In Bihar and Rajasthan, as many as 45.25% and 45.94% of the girls dropped out at primary level and 85.64% and 81.80% girls dropped out respectively, before they could complete secondary education. In Kerala, on the other hand, dropout rates at primary level were 0 %, for both boys and girls and the dropout rate for boys was higher (7.44%) than that of girls (2.42%) at the secondary level.

Girls' enrollment in education has, although, seen a broad trend increase over time at all levels of education, it continues to lag behind that of boys. In 2001-02, girls' enrolment remained below 50 per cent of total enrolment at the primary school level. This percentage of girls' enrolment goes down to 18.7% as one goes higher up at the secondary level, which indicates that more than 30% girls drop out before reaching secondary education.

The number of girls per 100 boys in primary and secondary education clears the picture on gender disparity; there were 87 girls at the primary level, which decreased to 81 and 72 at the secondary and higher secondary levels respectively in 2005-2006. Inter-state disparity was glaring in this respect as Table 4.1 reflects:

Table 4.1: No. of Girls/100 Boys (2005-2006)

States	Primary	Middle	Secondary and Higher Secondary
Bihar	70	68	47
Uttar Pradesh	85	70	58
Rajasthan	85	61	46
Kerala	90	92	100
Mizoram	94	97	98
India	87	81	72

Source: Abstracts, Selected Educational Statistics (2005-2006), Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education.

One must read and understand these figures as indicative of access to education, representative yet not descriptive of the subjective educational experience of women or the structural constraints experienced by women in life outside school that restrict their participation in education.

4.4.2 Out-of-school Reasons for the Gap

Since social stratification works as a matrix of cross sections of various forms of stratification like caste, class, gender, ethnicity, region, religion. It must be read in its true cross-sectional nature of existence, that is, various levels of stratification interact to produce a distinct experience of social stratification. Say while, a prosperous, propertied Brahmin Hindu man, would reap the benefits by virtue of his caste, class as well as gender, amplifying his powers as well as choices and resources, a poor, dalit girl would stand at the base of the matrix of social stratification with her oppression being amplified by virtue of her class, caste and gender.

Women in their lives outside school experience constraints imposed by factors that operate in mutually appreciative and interactive manner. The socio-cultural devaluation, seeks sanctions from religion (largely dominated by men). Women in Indian society are viewed as liability, in their native homes. As explained earlier women have social equivalence to valuable gifts tying various social groups in bonds of affinity. Women are viewed as not of any significance by themselves but in relation to the men they are exchanged between, as a result, women in broad Indian context are viewed as secondary to their male counterparts. Resource allocation and entitlement reflects this foundational belief that women of the family are '*Paraya Dhan*' (a valuable that is to be given away, *in marriage*) thus,

- 1) Educational expenses that are incurred for a girl child's education are seen as expenditure as opposed to the view that son's education is investment, as a result comparatively, women access sub-standard options in education with the view of restricting expenditure.
- 2) The view that women have no individual significance feeds into an expectation of certain amicable, devotional submission from women. This gets reflected not only in the choices women make of leading a life that is in appreciation to that of their respective men but in daily matters of behaviour, that have indirect but significant effects on educational experiences of women. For instance, eating habits in north Indian households habituate women of the family to eat last, in situation where food may be scarce or men of the family eat more than usual, the food share of women would suffer, as a result of which the nutritional intake of women is noted to be much worse than that of men.
- 3) The expectation of women to be appreciative of a man's life, clan and choices coupled with clear demarcation of home domain as that of women and extension of responsibility of care and nurturance in view of women's reproductive roles works together towards producing a very specific kind of restriction. Women are expected to compensate for themselves, in lieu of whatever little (in comparison to the sons of the same family) is done for them, in material and immaterial ways. Through services made to the household, women symbolically justify their inclusion into what is dominantly believed to be a man's. Thus, as Malvika Karlekar (2003) observes women remain outsiders in their conjugal homes and work in ways to reinstate their allegiance to the family, and justify their inclusion. Thus the anxiety of successful inclusion of daughters into their conjugal homes dominate the concerns of the natal families as well in effect, causing what can be called training/socialisation towards better and sooner successful inclusion of women in conjugal homes. Thus, a considerable load of managing household chores falls upon women, in addition women are expected to assume and successfully master the maternal roles, acting effectively as surrogate mothers in absence of mothers (in poor households where they may be earning to gather resources), or as supplementing efforts.
- 4) Sexuality is a significant concern with respect to women, partly the reason behind curtailment and surveillance of women's mobility. The anxiety with respect to women's sexuality and sexual independence can be understood in two ways. First way links it to the classical conception of women as 'gift'

where a woman's sexuality is passed from its patron, that is, the father and/or brother or maternal uncle, to the owner, that is the husband, symbolised through various rituals in marriages. Thus a woman's sexuality, virginity and chastity are held as symbols of allegiance between social groups, leaving her individual choice irrelevant and unnecessary. Read as the honour (*izzat*) of the family and clan, in view of ensuring a successful marital exchange, a woman's sexuality becomes a reason for imposing restrictions on her life, mobility and choices. As a result enormous emphasis comes to rest upon her mobility stemming from the anxiety surrounding sexual freedom and choice. This is crucial to understanding the higher rate of drop out of girls when the distance between school and homes increase or at the onset of puberty. Another interesting explanation is offered by Mary E. John who argues that the idea of purity in many cultures (predominantly Hinduism) expresses deep set anxiety and concern with respect to the orifices of the body. Drawing from her analysis, female genitalia is a passage inside, while the same doesn't hold true for male genitalia, which is more intrusive/penetrating, thus the conception that a woman's body can be violated and made '*impure*'.

As a result women face a greater struggle to reach school and to continue till graduating. The out-of-school pressures impact, not just women's performance and efficiency but their very retention in education till school-graduation.

4.5 GENDERED EDUCATION: SCHOOLS AS SITES OF GENDER SOCIALISATION

Education is never neutral and knowledge is always value-laden and can either maintain or challenge the hegemonic order, sometimes simultaneously (Freire, 1972; Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2002). Educational institutions represent and establish social codes, teachers and heads of the institutions, bring along with them, to the classroom their uncritical socialisation and social profile specific common sense. These prove to be detrimental to the experience of women in education. Gender stereotypes get reinforcements and get reiterated through such uncritical attitudes in curricular texts and through teachers. Gendered assumptions govern not only behaviour, and attitudes but directly or indirectly comes to influence goal-expectation, gender-role expectation, available role-models for girls, systemic efforts at sustaining and retaining girl child, girls self-conception of their own ability and efforts.

4.5.1 Gendered Environment at School

Schools as institutions reflect social segregation on the basis of gender, and caste. A number of studies point out how schools are insensitive to the experiences of a girl child outside the schools. In this section we focus on how lack of structural supports due to lack of appreciation of the structural constraints on women outside schools, is likely to affect education of girl children. The lack of sanitation facilities or commuting facility is more likely to affect the retention of girls in the school, especially post-puberty. Similarly, given the anxiety surrounding unrelated men dominated spaces as a threat to '*izzat*' girls are far more likely to drop out of school due to lack of female teachers at school. The lack of female teachers at school is also likely to impact the girl child, since it would mean the absence of any concrete, role models to reinforce performance, effort and retention.

4.5.2 Gendered Attitudes

Although presence of female teachers at schools is likely to boost enrolment it is not a guarantee of retention and an empowering experience of education for the girl child. Female teachers may carry with them uncritical perpetuation of gender stereotypes prevalent in the larger society to the classroom. So, in essence teacher's uncritical gender ideas may reflect in various ways like:

- 1) Teachers assign non-curricular tasks based on gendered understanding of female and male bodies. Say, tasks that require physical strength like shifting of furniture would be given to male students, while tasks requiring monotonous repetition or nimble fingers would inevitably go to female students, like decorating the classroom etc.
- 2) The gendered perception of teachers also influence the verbal praising and/or reinforcement they would give to students of a gender category performing tasks traditionally considered to be in the domain of the other gender category. While teachers would reinforce gender appropriate tasks performance they are more likely to discourage a crossing over. Girls would be encouraged, on an average, more than boys for doing well at, say, sewing lessons, while boys would be encouraged more and pushed more for physical training lessons.
- 3) Such gendered perceptions may also reflect in the curricular opportunity and offers teachers may extend to their students. For instance, giving opportunities to write on the chalkboard in certain subjects reinforcing gendered perception of subjects.
- 4) Teachers often in their interactions but verbal and physical pay great respect to the gendered perception of children. For instance, rowdy and rough behaviour may be tolerated more and expected more from boys while on the other hand girls may be punished less severely for an equivalent offense.
- 5) Teachers/authorities at school may engage in explicit gender socialisation through negative reinforcement of behaviour considered by them (through their uncritical internalisation of their own gender socialisation), gender-inappropriate. Aspects such as walking, talking, laughing, and/or sitting inappropriately may come to provoke explicit gender socialisation through invocation of gender norms, unstated but agreed upon by a society.

4.5.3 Gendered Educational Experience

Students as well as teachers carry with themselves to school, cultural mores, values and norms dominant in the society at large, reinforcing gender inequality and prejudices.

Teachers, in previous as well as next section have been analysed for the way they participate in perpetuation of gender inequality and prejudices through non-curricular non-pedagogic interaction with children, or explicit intentional socialisation. Teachers also, are interpreters of a curricular text; hence their role in perpetuation of gender injustice manifests itself by means of their pedagogies, through their gendered translations of the text, in cases where the texts are gender just. In cases where the curriculum maybe itself, perpetuating gender injustice, as explained below, a teacher's uncritical attitude is more than enough to do the damage.

Peers are important and significant contributors to perpetuation of gender injustice. Peers actively scrutinise, supervise and check gender inappropriate behaviour. Peers act through internalised socialisation they receive to check and socialise their other peers, especially younger peers.

Curriculum is highly significant in the perpetuation and promotion of gender socialisation. *Nirantar(2009)* makes an elaborate analysis of the ways in which gender socialisation comes to manifest itself and perpetuate gender injustice through textbooks. Textbooks are often loaded with the subtexts that work in implicit ways to pay respect to gendered prejudices, prevalent in larger society. For instance, stories in literature had a strongly skewed ratio of stories with women as protagonists. Almost no stories depicted women in roles that may be aggressive, roles of leadership, explorers, or any other roles seen as masculine traits. Women were shown as nurturing, caring, empathetic weak, submissive, and passive roles.

Curriculum is a crucial to learning, as children may pick not only role models but they learn to relate to their own lives as well through texts. Gender prejudiced texts are likely to, if not single handedly, influence a girl's education negatively.

4.5.5 Gendered Choices

Various studies have noted that gender differences are institutionalised through repeated reinforcement at school level. The various factors work in a dynamic ways to restrict choices and segregate them into gendered categories. This kind of restriction of choice pays respect to gendered understanding of abilities, appropriate domains of activity and power equation between women and men. Thus, subjects that are tool-use-intensive and are likely to reap greater economic-social rewards, thereby ensuring greater power in gender relations are seen as male domain. These subjects witness unusually high concentration of boys opting for these subjects and also qualifying for them. It is interesting to note that these subjects also are popular. The popularity-socio-economic returns-engendering must be read as a phenomena occurring through a dynamic interaction between the three and not in linearity. Subjects that are more popular, have better job prospects and are likely to yield greater social prestige and/or has leadership potential and/or is associated with higher pay-back, get dominated by males. In return, in a somewhat circular logic, the higher concentration of men becomes an implicit rationale behind all of the above said becoming associated with the job. The same circular logic works in the case of women, that is, because it is done by women, it is paid less, and because it is paid less, women finds them doing it.

This kind of phenomena is usually read as lack of necessary qualification and merit in girls can be understood better through the way the choices come to manifest themselves as largely a male or female domain. Through differential expectations from girls and boys with regard to their performance in say, mathematics, through greater positive reinforcement of a better performance, through explicit mentoring of students into choosing subjects that are gender-expectation appropriate, through gender-differential intellectual and economic effort invested in a student's learning process, not just by the school authorities, teachers but also by parents, this kind of gender difference is reproduced.

4.5.6 Implications

Women face unequal life situations that inhibit their potential of accessing education as well as experiencing it and reaping returns of educational qualifications. In out of school life women face an unnatural curbing of their natural child like agility, are cultured into being submissive and passive. Their life situations become restricting to their educational prospects.

Not only does this mean that half of our population could not be developed as a human resource, but also that women in particular have not been able to actualise their potential. Since female literacy has a lot to do with levels of fertility and mortality, nutritional status, earning capacity and her own independence within and outside home, it would take more than just isolated efforts to sustain women into education long enough for it to empower them economically, and personally.

4.6 WAY AHEAD: RE-EVALUATION AND RE-EXAMINATION

Gender, like all other concepts, is neither fixed nor static. The understanding of what gender is, has been changing, with and through; political, social and cultural movements providing the necessary impetus towards its re-definition. The re-defining, then calls upon a re-examination of how gender comes to reflect in socio-cultural processes as restricting or discriminating principle. Gender discourse in Indian context needs such a re-evaluation to evolve out of its neat bipolar conceptualisation of the world into two sex categories (Zimmermann), and re-examine how this conception has been at the foundation of newer forms of exclusion and discrimination of the populations on this basis.

It is important here to understand that defining a concept, and its subsequent usage and inclusion into socio-cultural discourses in a fixed manner lays the foundation of exclusion and discrimination. For instance, the initial conception of what constituted 'Rape' could not account for marital rape, since non-consented sex could not be understood in an obligatory sexual relationship, that stood at the foundational understanding of marriages in more than one cultural and social contexts.

Through the first three waves of feminist movement, the understanding of gender remained largely concentrated around two foundational beliefs, first being, the bipolar (divided into two neat halves), something Foucault (1979; 1980) called *Dimorphic or two-sex model* conceptualisation of gender, that is gender concerns being reflecting an engagement with the world as constitutive of men and women only. Related is the second foundational belief which Adrienne Rich (1980; published in her book in 1986) termed *Compulsory Heterosexuality*. She argued that, the feminist scholarship in its earlier conceptualisations reflected an unsettling agreement about the 'natural' affinity between the two sexes. The two very interrelated points came to challenge, the conceptualisation of male domination, put into place by the works of Gayle Rubin (1975), and Kate Millet (1977).

Indian context largely reflects this understanding in its institutional setups and in educational, political, social, cultural, religious and to a large extent even the legal discourse, with little or no contestation. Gender concerns in Indian context

took the form of women's movement making a clear departure from feminist thought, standing itself apart from western scholarship. The argument presented stressed the distinct nature of society and emphasised as well as evolved from social activism as opposed to theoretical engagement as in western context.(Chaudhuri, 2004). However, the male domination and socio-cultural devaluation stands at the basis of all arguments raised by women's movement in India. It is interesting to note that the very conceptualisation, although drawing from urgent need for social activism, is a *Women's movement* not *Gender Rights movement*. The point of emphasis being that the origin and conceptualisation reflected the idea developed by Rubin, to explain historical devaluation and oppression of women in societies. It drew from Rubin's analysis of anthropological works of Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss (explained in introduction). The conceptualisation came to be challenged in the wake of the arguments contesting against the two-sex theory and compulsory affinity between them.

This kind of conceptualisation had paid little or no attention to a systemic oppression the idea of masculinity imposed on men, and the immense exclusion, marginalisation experienced by homosexual, queer, transgender and inter-sexed people. However, this re-definition caused a re-evaluation of gender as a system that is oppressive to sexual identities and sexualities. The changed understanding came to reflect in re-evaluations of the kind of discrimination such defining had led to, in various socio-cultural, institutional and systemic setups. Educational context, content, praxis and educational experiences thus saw a renewed zeal to re-examine imposition of role expectations to fit into dimorphic sex-categories, causing marginalisation of sexual identity and sexualities.

Such a re-examination is impending in Indian context, the primacy of social activism has resulted in a rather restricted but significant expression and representation of rights and demands by the multiple sexual identities and sexualities. However, translating a successful politico-social and legal representation into the necessary impetus towards critical re-evaluation and restructuring of educational context and experience would take significant time and effort.

4.7 SUMMARY

Education has been defined and guarded by the advantaged sections of the society. At any point in the course of human history, education, as defined by the socially dominating groups has been assigned social prestige and cultural-economic-political rewards. Education is seen as a matter of heritage that is kept in exclusive custody of the dominant sections. As a result, women globally have found themselves struggling to attain their rightful access to education. Women have continued to oppose exclusion from accessing and manipulating/evaluating and evolving education to be more inclusive and representative of women's reality.

Indian context has carried forth its legacy of cultural devaluation of women. Women, being assigned a status of gift exchanged between men, assigns them little significance of their own. As a result culturally, women face greater pressure to be '*useful to men*'. Such a preoccupation as a precondition to constrained access to resources, limits women's life choices and lifestyles. The daily routines as an appreciation of the life of associated men leaves women with very unfair conditions to battle against in order to access and perform in educational spaces.

At the same point of time, women's educational experiences are is anything, reproductive of the unfair social order increasing the social handicap that women face.

Conceptualisation of gender dynamics is crucial to understanding women's situation in socio-political and thus educational contexts. With increased contestations to the conceptualisation of gender dynamics, globally, we face the need to re-evaluate women's position in the greater matrix of sexualities and their inter-relating dynamics.

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Suggested Readings

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- 1) How are gender inequalities created and reproduced within and around contemporary schools, and in wider society?
- 2) In what ways does the culture and society inhibit the educational access to women?
- 3) Analyse the influence of marriage-concerns on a girl's education.
- 4) Contrast the out-of-school experiences for girls and boys, and its impact on their educational possibilities.

