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GENDER, GENDER ROLES AND SOCIETY: A POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

The gender perspective looks at the impact of gender on people's opportunities, social roles and interactions. Successful implementation of the policy, programme and project goals of international and national organizations is directly affected by the impact of gender and, in turn, influences the process of social development. Gender is an integral component of every aspect of the economic, social, daily and private lives of individuals and societies, and of the different roles ascribed by society to men and women.

Sex refers to the permanent and immutable biological characteristics common to individuals in all societies and cultures, while gender defines traits forged throughout the history of social relations. Gender, although it originates in objective biological divergencies, goes far beyond the physiological and biological specifics of the two sexes in terms of the roles each is expected to play. Gender differences are social constructs, inculcated on the basis of a specific society's particular perceptions of the physical differences and the assumed tastes, tendencies and capabilities of men and women. Gender differences, unlike the immutable characteristics of sex, are universally conceded in historical and comparative social analyses to be variants that are transformed over time and from one culture to the next, as societies change and evolve.

KEYWORDS -Gender, society, sex, development, Political perspectives, social construction.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a social construct that impacts attitudes, roles, responsibilities and behavior patterns of boys and girls, men and women in all societies. Increasing attention has been given to the importance of achieving gender equality in education. To date, however, most efforts have focused on addressing gender parity - an equal number or proportion of girls and boys accessing educational opportunities. Although simple gender parity may be easier to measure, gender equality encompasses a wider concept, of which gender parity is only a part. Gender equality moves beyond access and requires that girls and boys also experience the same levels of quality and outcomes of education. One of the key impediments to achieving gender equality in education is that it cannot be addressed in a vacuum; rather, educational institutions are products of the inequalities that exist in larger society. Educational institutions are shaped by the societal forces that perpetuate gender-based discrimination; yet, they can also be essential tools to effect great change throughout a community or social

context. Behaviours and beliefs formed in schools and educational institutions can have a lasting impact on gender relations in society. Education systems are both a result of external forces and instrumental to perpetuating or alleviating gender disparity around the world.

This unit emphasizes the concept of gender, types of gender roles, attitude towards gender and social construction of gender. This unit creates a lot of inputs for the prospective teachers about the gender issues, gender dynamics and gender roles.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

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

- describe the concept of gender and sex,
- recognize the difference between gender and sex
- explain the terms gender dynamics
- describe the social construction of gender
- understand different types of gender roles
- analysis the gender relationship matrix
- identify the division of gender and valuation of work based on gender
- describe the gender roles and development

GENDER CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY:

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. Systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age and more, modify gender roles. The concept of gender is vital because, applied to social analysis, it reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever.

The concept of gender needs to be understood clearly as a cross-cutting socio-cultural variable. It is an overarching variable in the sense that gender can also be applied to all other cross-cutting variables such as race, class, age, ethnic group, etc. Gender systems are established in different socio-cultural contexts which determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy in these specific contexts. Gender roles are learned through socialization processes; they are not fixed but are changeable. Gender systems are institutionalized through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, and culture and traditions. In utilizing a gender approach the focus is not on individual women and men but on the system which determines gender roles / responsibilities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making potentials.

The gender concept implies:

A rejection of the underlying biological distinction in the word “sex” and in the expression “sexual inequality”, which appears as “an ideological alibi for maintaining domination, the alibi of nature”. Women are no more part of nature and no less part of culture than men;

Grouping together all the differences identified between men and women, be they individual differences, differences in social roles or cultural representations, i.e., the grouping together of all that is variable and socially determined;

The non-homogenous nature of the category of women, which is transcended by differences of class, ethnicity and age;

The basic asymmetry and hierarchy between both groups, sexes and genders – one of them dominating and the other dominated - which is the basis of male power; Related terminology and concepts include:

Gender roles: The particular economic, political and social roles and responsibilities that are considered appropriate for men and women in a culture.

Gender equality: The absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in authority, opportunities, allocation of resources or benefits, and access to services.

Gender equity: The process of being fair to women and men. Sometimes this involves measures to redress historical disadvantages that have prevented men and women from having equal access to rights and privileges. Equity leads to equality. Gender equity also implies that health needs, which are specific to each gender, receive appropriate resources.

Gender awareness: Understanding that there are socially determined differences between men and women, and that these influence access to and control of resources.

Gender Sensitivity: The ability to perceive existing gender differences and issues, and to incorporate these into strategies and actions. Contrast with gender blindness.

Gender analysis: Identifies the inequalities that arise from the different roles of men and women, and analyzes the consequences of these inequalities for their lives, health and well-being.

Gender Mainstreaming: The process used to ensure that women's and men's concerns and experiences are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes.

Gender Parity: A numerical concept concerned with the relative equality in terms of numbers and proportions of women, men, girls and boys. In education, this means that the same number of boys and girls receive educational services at different levels and in diverse forms.

DEFINITION OF GENDER:

1. According to Simone De Beauvoir-“One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one “.

2. Gender is defined by FAO as ‘the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’ (FAO, 1997).

Gender has been defined as: "The commonly shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics and roles. Gender can be considered a social and cultural construct that differentiates females from males and thus defines the ways in which females and males interact with each

other. These roles and expectations are learned and they can change over time as well as vary within and between cultures."

3. Difference between Gender and Sex The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are closely linked, yet they are not synonyms. Robert Stoller, in the 1960s, has drawn the distinction between them. He suggested that the word 'sex' be used to refer to the physical differences between men and women, while the term 'gender' be used in connection to the behaviour and cultural practices of men and women.

Sex:

'Sex' refers to the biological characteristics or natural biological differences between men and women, for example, the differences in the organs related to reproduction. A person's sex is biologically determined as female or male according to certain identifiable physical features which are fixed. Women's marginalisation has often been seen as 'natural' and a fact of their biology.

Gender:

Gender refers to the cultural, socially constructed differences between the two sexes. It refers to the way society encourages and teaches the two sexes to behave in different through socialization. 'Gender' and the hierarchical power relations between women and men based on this are socially constructed, and not derived directly from biology. Gender identities and associated expectations of roles and responsibilities are therefore changeable between and within cultures. Gendered power relations permeate social institutions so that gender is never absent. The following are difference between sex and gender with respects to some attributes.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT:

Gender is a culture-specific construct - there are significant differences in what women and men can or cannot do in one culture as compared to another. But what is fairly consistent across cultures is that there is always a distinct difference between women's and men's roles, access to productive resources, and decision-making authority. Typically, men are seen as being responsible for the productive activities outside the home while women.

Sexuality is distinct from gender yet intimately linked to it. It is the social construction of a biological drive. An individual's sexuality is defined by whom one has sex with, in what ways, why, under what circumstances, and with what outcomes. It is more than sexual behavior; it is a multidimensional and dynamic concept." An overview Historically, four main gender narratives can be identified in the development discourse: the Women in Development (WID) approach, the Gender in Development (GAD) approach, post- structuralism theory, and the human rights-based approach (HRBA). It must be noted that elements of all narratives coexist and each narrative builds on the next, rather than replacing it.

Women in Development Approach: In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the WID approach became popular in the development field as a result of the concern that women were being left out of economic development processes. The approach focused on the inclusion of women in development as a tool to increase the economic and social efficiency of development processes. When applied to education, the WID approach is marked by an emphasis on expansion of education for girls and women, which is linked to economic growth and social efficiency. For example, WID advocates for investments in girls' education, citing increased societal benefits such as reduced child mortality rates, reduced fertility rates and increased gross domestic product per capita. The WID approach is prominently featured in the concept of gender parity, the notion that an equal proportion of girls and boys should be enrolled in and complete schooling.

1. Gender in Development Approach: By the late 1980s, the GAD approach came to the forefront. This approach sought to challenge root causes of gender inequality and increase women's access to resources and decision making (DFID, 2002). The GAD approach focused on 'empowerment', or increasing the agency of women and giving them the power to take control of their own lives (UNESCO, 2009), often through targeted trainings and workshops. This approach also emphasizes gender equity as an objective, which refers to the process of being fair to women and men and challenging policies that unfairly bias men or women.

2. Post-structuralism and development:

Post-structuralism theories critique a number of development practices and methodologies, particularly the power relations perpetuated by concepts such as 'development', 'development- assistance' and 'women' in the developing world. These theories draw from post-colonial literary and cultural studies and assess the influence of colonialism on the development and conceptions of gender. Post-structuralist theories are concerned with questions of identity and view gender as a malleable form of identification rather than a fixed definition present in conventional development discourse. From the post-structural perspective, schooling is, in part, a process that should serve to acknowledge and critique set notions of identity, including gender and marginalized identities. While post-structuralist theory is influential within academia and in various political movements that focus on the rights of marginalized populations, it has not greatly influenced government and non-governmental organization (NGO) policies or practices.

3. Human rights-based approach:

An overarching development approach that has been applied to education is the HRBA. It is based on the belief that education is a universal, inalienable human right that is interdependent with other basic human rights. This approach aims to ensure that all traditionally marginalized groups, including but not limited to girls and women, indigenous people, persons with disabilities and linguistic and/or cultural minorities, have access to education (UNICEF, 2007). After the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 1995 United Nations International Conference on Women, the concept of gender mainstreaming was also widely adopted by the development community. Gender mainstreaming is a "commitment to ensure that women's as well as men's concerns and experiences are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated".

4. Gender Dynamics:

Gender dynamics include the relationships and interactions between and among boys, girls, women, and men. Gender dynamics are informed by socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending upon how they are manifested, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms. Gender dynamics is nothing but the way in which men and women are treated or behave differently in society, either with their own gender or with each other. The changes in gender dynamics and roles in society for an individual or group can be changed by either economic standing, age or other factors.

A handful of behaviors are sometimes considered negative by a portion of society whom believes it makes men and women unequal. Feminist being the most popular example of this. Though most feminists tend to ignore how gender dynamics tend to treat men unfairly as well or how they're ultimately inescapable but can be reversed or changed in a way to become different from their original form. Other than that gender dynamics are an important part in the human experience and have been found in every society throughout history. Including our own, and will continue to be relevant in the societies our future descendants make.

Before the 21st century parents dressed young boys in frilly, typically feminine dresses and it was difficult to distinguish between boys and girls. Today a boy would be socially segregated for having long hair, proving

that gender dynamics are still relevant in the hip 21st century. Gender dynamics can impact on the ability of learners to access and fully participate in quality education. Barriers to learning will often be different for male and female learners, who face different risks and have different needs. Sometimes the gender dynamics are clearly visible, but at other times they might be less obvious, or even hidden. Using a gender lens to analyze access to and full participation in education is critical.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER:

The idea that gender difference is socially constructed is a view present in many philosophical and sociological theories about gender. According to this view, society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific gender. Some argue that the differences in behavior between men and women are entirely social conventions, whereas others believe that behavior is influenced by biological universal factors to some extent, with social conventions having a major effect on gendered behavior. The following are the some of the social constructions of gender.

1. Gender-based harassment: Girls are expected to conform to stereotypical gendered appearances, as are boys. Both male and female students regularly take part in policing gender boundaries through bullying. Male students frequently harass male and female students, while female students generally only harass other female students. The practice of male students bullying other male students is explicitly linked to machismo that boys are expected to subscribe to in order to be constructed and related to as 'normal' boys. Many girls report that boys tease and ridicule them on the basis of their appearance, which is linked to boys asserting masculine power through sexist practices of denigrating girls. This also serves to perpetuate the idea that appearance is a female's most important asset. The way in which girls harass other girls is through gossiping, instead of confronting the other girls directly. Unique appearances and attempts to stand out among girls are regarded very negatively. This type of female-on-female bullying sets the standard for appearance norms and the importance of appearance for females.

2. Adolescent view of adulthood: Gender is a cultural construction which creates an environment where an adolescent's performance in high school is related to their life goals and expectations. Because most young women know they want to be mothers and wives, the choice of professions and future goals can be inherently flawed by the gender constraints. Because a girl may want to be a mother later, her academics in high school can create clear gender differences because "higher occupational expectations, educational expectations, and academic grades were more strongly associated with the expected age of parenthood for girls than for boys".

3. Depression: High school continues to become a higher-pressure environment with academic and social triggers increasing the expectations of adolescents. High school is a large transitional period for teenagers causing them to "cope with these various transitions in different ways; some negotiate the passages easily whereas others develop serious behavioral and psychological problems". One of these psychological problems is depression. While the environment of high school can be stressful biological functions also play a large role is psychological well-being. Depression can be isolating, and without proper academics and societal support, high school can be challenging. Along with higher rates of self-esteem issues in adolescents, this can adversely affect girls' academics and social life in high school.

4. Body image: There are many different factors that affect body image, "including sex, media, parental relationship, and puberty as well as weight and popularity". The intersectionality of these factors causes unique experiences for adolescents during this period within their lives. As their body changes, so does the environment in which they live in. Body image is closely linked to psychological during adolescence and can cause harmful effects when a child has body dissatisfaction. Education: Due to the amount of time that children spend in school, "teachers are influential role models for many aspects of children's educational experiences,

including gender socialization". Teachers who endorse the culturally dominant gender-role stereotype regarding the distribution of talent between males and females distort their perception of their students' mathematical abilities and effort resources in mathematics, in a manner that is consistent with their gender-role stereotype and to a greater extent than teachers who do not endorse the stereotype.

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES:

Political science studies gender through:

- **Women's Political Participation**-This refers to how actively women take part in politics - voting, contesting elections, joining political parties, and participating in campaigns. Low participation means women's issues get less attention in decision-making.
- **Representation in Legislatures** - This means the number of women in Parliament, State Assemblies, and local bodies. Higher representation ensures that issues like women's safety, health, and education are discussed and addressed properly.
- **Gender-Sensitive Public Policies** - These are policies designed keeping in mind the different needs of men and women. Examples include maternity benefits, laws for women's safety, childcare support, and equal pay for equal work.
- **Constitutional Rights** - The Indian Constitution guarantees equality to women. Fundamental Rights protect women from discrimination and ensure equal opportunities in all areas.
- **Reservation and Affirmative Action** - To increase women's presence in politics, certain seats are reserved for them. This provides women with opportunities to enter politics and leadership roles, even when social barriers exist.
- **Political Empowerment** - This means giving women real power in decision-making and leadership. It is not just about voting, but about women becoming policy-makers and leaders who can influence governance.

Indian Context -

- **Constitutional Guarantees of Equality** - Articles 14, 15, and 16
 - Article 14: Equality before law for all citizens
 - Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.
 - Article 16: Equal opportunity in matters of public employment.
- **Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government** -After the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 33% of seats in Panchayats and Municipalities are reserved for women. This has increased women's leadership at the grassroots level.
- **Women's Reservation Initiatives in Legislatures** - The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam provides 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. This aims to increase women's representation at the national and state level.
- **Government Schemes for Women's Empowerment** -The government runs schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mission Shakti, and Mahila Shakti Kendra to support women in education, health, safety, and economic independence.

Importance of the Study

- 1. Understanding Social Impact:** This study helps explain how gender roles influence individuals, families, and society.
- 2. Recognizing Barriers:** It highlights how traditional gender expectations can contribute to inequality, discrimination, and unequal access to education, employment, and leadership.
- 3. Promoting Equality:** The study emphasizes the need to promote gender equality by encouraging equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender.
- 4. Challenging Stereotypes:** It raises awareness about the importance of challenging harmful stereotypes and creating an inclusive society where everyone can develop their abilities without discrimination.
- 5. Benefiting Stakeholders:** The findings can benefit students, educators, researchers, policymakers, and social organizations by providing insights into the changing nature of gender roles and their impact on social development.
- 6. Contribution to Development:** Promoting gender equality contributes to economic growth, social justice, and sustainable development, making this topic highly relevant in today's world.

Challenges of Gender Roles in Society:

- 1. Gender Stereotypes:** Traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women often limit individual choices and reinforce unequal expectations.
- 2. Workplace Inequality:** Women may experience unequal pay, limited opportunities for promotion, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. Men may also face stigma when pursuing careers or roles traditionally associated with women.
- 3. Educational Barriers:** In some communities, girls and boys may not receive equal educational opportunities due to cultural or economic factors.
- 4. Unequal Distribution of Household Responsibilities:** Women often carry a larger share of unpaid domestic work and caregiving, affecting their career and educational opportunities.
- 5. Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:** Many individuals face harassment, discrimination, and violence because of their gender, limiting their safety and participation in society.
- 6. Cultural and Social Expectations:** Traditional customs and social norms can discourage individuals from pursuing their interests or careers if they conflict with expected gender roles.
- 7. Mental Health and Social Pressure:** Pressure to conform to traditional ideas of masculinity or femininity can lead to stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and other mental health challenges.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Promote gender equality through education by including gender-sensitive topics in school and college curricula.
2. Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and encourage equal opportunities for all.
3. Ensure equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and leadership positions regardless of gender.
4. Strengthen laws and policies that prevent gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence.
5. Encourage the equal sharing of household responsibilities and caregiving among family members.
6. Promote fair recruitment, equal pay, and career advancement opportunities in workplaces.
7. Encourage media organizations to portray men and women in diverse, respectful, and non-stereotypical roles.
8. Support community programs that empower women and encourage the active participation of all genders in social and economic development.
9. Encourage research and regular assessment of gender-related issues to develop effective policies and interventions.
10. Foster a culture of mutual respect, inclusion, and equal rights so that every individual can contribute fully to society without discrimination.

Conclusions

Gender relations are accordingly defined as the specific mechanisms whereby different cultures determine the functions and responsibilities of each sex. They also determine access to material resources, such as land, credit and training, and more ephemeral resources, such as power. The implications for everyday life are many, and include the division of labour, the responsibilities of family members inside and outside the home, education and opportunities for professional advancement and a voice in policy-making.

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