

# Chapter 1: What is Gender Studies? Understanding Basic Concepts

## 1.1 An Introduction to Gender Studies

Think of the activities that take place in an average household during the course of a day. Food is cooked; cleaning is done – sweeping, mopping, and dusting. Groceries and other household items are purchased. Clothes are washed, dried, ironed. Sometimes household repairs are carried out. Garbage is discarded. Also, the people who live in the house need to be looked after. Sometimes they may have special needs – for example babies need constant supervision.

These are some of the things that are required to be done to keep homes functioning. These activities take a lot of time, and many are to be done on a daily basis. The people who do them expend a lot of energy and may be exhausted when they are finished. Most of the time, women perform these tasks. Put together, these tasks are called housework. Given this name, it may be surprising to learn that housework is not considered to be work in economic or social terms. It is seen as a set of tasks that is naturally performed by the women of a household. It is not, for example, calculated as part of the country's Gross Domestic Product (the sum of all goods and services produced in a country in a given period). This is in spite of the fact that if the women of



the house are unable or unwilling to do these tasks, other people will do them – but only if they are paid to do so.

Housework is not the only area in which women's work is not recognised as work.

We would generally see



characteristics that a person is expected to possess by virtue of being male or female, as well as the different roles that the person is expected to perform. For example, women may be seen as naturally caring and nurturing, while men may be seen as naturally rational and logical; this may lead to the belief that women are naturally suited to jobs like nursing, while men will make good scientists and engineers. The traits associated with masculinity and femininity varies across different cultures and societies, as well as different periods in history.

Gender studies looks at the manner in which the norms and patterns of behaviour associated with masculinity and femininity come into being. It studies the features of these norms and patterns – which traits are considered masculine, which feminine, and why? How do stereotypical models of men and women develop? How do they change over time, and what factors contribute to changes? Also, and very importantly, what impact do such stereotypes have upon actually existing men and women?

Think of two women. One who teaches in a school and one who is a construction worker. What kind of differences and commonalities can you visualize in their working lives?

This last point – that gender studies also has a focus upon actually existing men and women – is significant because within gender studies, there is a recognition that men and women do not exist in isolation from their other social roles and positions. A women is not only a woman – within our society, she also has a certain class position, caste position, religious identity, sexual identity, and many more. All of these factors impact her life – therefore while studying her life, all these factors need to be taken into consideration.

Another feature of gender studies is that it examines how the world is gendered. Some examples can explain this concept in more clear terms:

Think of the difference in girls’ and boys’ clothing. Skirts, saris, salwar-kurtas are seen as feminine clothing, and trousers, shirts, sherwanis, etc. as masculine. There are other differences too – feminine clothing is often more colourful than masculine clothing, more likely to be decorated with sparkles and shiny material.

Sometimes there is an overlap in men and women's clothing. For example, both men



and women may wear denim jeans. But even here, it can be noted that there are differences – in cuts, i.e. in how the jeans fits the wearer (tight or loose), in colours and embellishments (embroidery, sequins, crystals etc.). Thus even in common items of clothing, there are differences. Clothing is gendered. It differs for both genders, and in doing so; it allows determining whether the wearer is male or female. Sometimes men and women do wear clothing that is absolutely identical. For example, a school uniform may also consist of a tie that both girls and boys have to wear. In this case, can it be said that the tie is also a gendered article of clothing?

From a gender studies perspective, it will

be seen that clothing that is common to both men and women is often men's clothing that women have also adopted. Neckties would be an example of this. Think of other examples. It may be noticed that both men and women go to work in offices wearing business suits – trousers and jackets. These are masculine clothes that have been adopted by women. It is much less common to find examples of women's clothing that have been adopted, on a large scale, by men. It is not usual to see men going to work wearing saris. This example also indicates another area that gender studies focuses on – that of power differences between genders. It is more common to see the powerless adopting the characteristics of the powerful, than the powerful adopting the characteristics of the powerless.

### 1.3 Life in a Gendered World

People may advise a young person on which subjects to take in school or college by saying, “you should study this – it is a good subject for a girl” or “that is not the right subject for a boy”. In this way, education is also gendered, as is the job market – different opportunities are considered to be appropriate for girls and boys. Certain careers are gendered – nursing, for example, is a profession that has more women than men and which is not deemed appropriate for men. Physical spaces may be gendered. Think of the roads of a city – can anyone be out on the street at any time? There are no

You may have observed seats being reserved for women on public transport. What does this say about public transport being gendered?

rules prohibiting anyone from going out onto the street. Yet it is found that women do not stay out on the streets as late as men do. Women also do not spend time hanging around on the streets – at a teashop, for instance, alone or chatting with friends. Men and women thus have different kinds of access to streets, and have different experiences of being out on the streets. In these ways, physical spaces are also gendered.

Thus various aspects of living world are gendered. They differ for different genders, the experiences of them differ in ways that depending upon the gender. The study of the gendered nature of the social and physical world is an important part of gender studies.

The perspective of gender studies can be applied to a variety of situations, examples of which have been given. These examples were all from different academic disciplines – sociology, political science, biology, law, and economics. Thus gender studies encompass many disciplines. It is multidisciplinary. This is an important dimension of gender studies because it has also pointed out certain gaps in various disciplines.



**Though Living on the Same Planet,  
We Grow Up in Gendered Worlds**

The origins of gender studies lie in women's studies. Women's studies came into being in order to address the gaps and imbalances in academic knowledge that resulted from an inadequate incorporation of women into academics. Many women's studies scholars have pointed out that often, academic disciplines would not take women into account when developing theories and concepts, or when doing research and collecting data. An example of this has been given above – women's unpaid housework is not calculated as part of our country's GDP. If the GDP is to reflect the total of the goods and services produced in the country, shouldn't it then include housework? If it doesn't, isn't it then inaccurate? A gender studies perspective can, in this way, indicate and correct imbalances and inaccuracies in various disciplines. It can also ask the significant question – why have these errors and imbalances come into being? Why have various disciplines not recognised the contributions of women? Why have these contributions been devalued and/or ignored?

Gender studies has, in this way, questioned the theories and underlying assumptions of many disciplines. In doing so, it has also developed new tools and techniques for research.

One of the most significant dimensions of gender studies is that it is political. It raises questions about power in society, and how and why power is differentially distributed between different genders. It asks questions about who has power over whom, in which situations, how power is exercised, and how it is, and can be, challenged. Different theories and perspectives within gender studies have different approaches to these questions, and look for answers in different social processes. Many debates are on going, as new data is revealed and new theories are put forth.



## 2. GENDER: BASIC CONCEPTS

Excerpts from a boy's diary...

*"I have a friend who has long hair,*

*No you guessed it wrong,*

*That friend is not Siya or Ria, his name is Rajan.*

*I like the way Ajay takes care of his baby sister,*

*But it is sad that a few boys ridicule him for this, why?*

*The other day when I saw women in mountains carrying heavy loads,*

*I felt how wrong I was to think only men are strong."*

As a discipline gender studies has developed certain terms and concepts which are used while studying the phenomenon of gender. An understanding of their meaning and implications allows us to see and connect various aspects of it.

### 2.1 Sex Vs Gender

Sometimes it is hard to understand exactly what is meant by the term 'gender' and how it differs from the closely related term 'sex'.

Understanding of the social construction of gender starts with explaining the two concepts, i.e., gender and sex. Often these two terms are used interchangeably: however, they bear different meanings as concepts.

"Sex" refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. It is defined as the anatomical and physiological characteristics that signify the biological maleness and femaleness of an individual.

"Gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given

society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender emphasizes that masculinity and femininity are products of social, cultural and psychological factors and are

*In our society men and women perform different roles and are assigned different responsibilities. Why is it so? Is this natural or has society made these rules?*

acquired by an individual in the process of becoming a man or woman. 'Gender' is the term widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature. The biological sexes are redefined, represented, valued, and channelled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways.

Sex as defined earlier is the concept that emerges from anatomical and physiological characteristics that differentiates males and females biologically whereas gender can be seen as a social construct manifested by masculine and feminine roles prevalent in a culture or a society. Thus gender can be seen as an artefact of social, cultural and psychological factors which are attained during the process of socialization of an individual.

What is the significance of the concept 'gender'? In talking about the social and cultural construction of masculinity and femininity, gender allows us to see these dimensions of human



roles and personalities as based not on nature but on social factors. It then allows us to address issues like subordination and discrimination as issues where change is possible. Therefore the meaning of sex and gender, femininity and masculinity fluctuates within societies and cultures across the globe.

The key differences between these two terms are:

SEX	GENDER
It is natural	It is a social construct.
It is biological. It denotes to visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function.	It is a socio-cultural construct and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, related roles and responsibility, etc.



It is a universal term	It is variable it changes under the influence of time, geographical and socio-cultural settings.
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**Write 'S' for biological and 'G' for gender for statements you consider appropriate.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Women give birth to babies, men do not.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Girls are gentle; boys are rough.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Doctors are men; nurses are women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Boys don't cry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Boys are good at math and science and girls are good at language and history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When one thinks of an engineer, one hardly ever thinks of a woman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food and yet earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Boys' voices break at puberty, girls' do not.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. A girl is expected to return home early while a boy can comfortably have a night-out with his friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Kindergarten teachers should be women; men are not good at taking care of young children.

## 2.2 Gender as a Social Construct

People do not merely internalize gender roles as they grow up but they respond to the norms prevalent in the society. Children learn to categorize themselves by gender from infancy. A part of this is learning how to display and perform gendered identities as masculine or feminine. Children observe and gradually internalize the gendered behaviour



around them through different medium and sources. Gender- differentiated children's activities gradually cement the gender difference in behaviour that later reflect in the nature of adult male and female behaviour.

Gender refers to culturally constructed roles that are played by women and men in society. Further, gender is used as a concept to analyse the shaping of women's and men's behaviour according to the normative order of a society. Gender as a conceptual tool is used to analyse the structural relationships of inequality existing between women and men, as reflected in various aspects of life such as the household, the labour market, education and political institutions. Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological differences between female and male which are seen as uniform across time and space. Gender can therefore be defined as a notion through which the social and ideological construction and representation of differences between the sexes can be understood.

Gender is a complex phenomenon which is socially and culturally constructed. An individual acquires gender through a process of socialization, i.e., the person acquires the gendered body - feminine or masculine - in the course of social development. The construction of femininity and masculinity plays an important role in shaping various institutions like the family. Understanding of gender in relation to society leads to a reflection on the existing power relations between women and men. Children are socialised into performing the gender roles required of them. For example, young girls may be encouraged to play with dolls, and when they are slightly older, may be expected to participate in housework. It is in these ways that they come to learn what codes of behaviour are considered appropriate for them, which norms they have to conform to.

#### **Let's Ponder**

- Do you think Nature created boys and girls to be equal? What makes you think so?
- In what ways are boys and girls similar? In what ways are they different?
- How do you feel when someone says, "Don't do that. You are a boy/girl"?

- Name a profession that only men or only women can pursue.
- Do people treat boys and girls in the same way?
- What do you like the best about being a boy/ girl?
- Is there something that you really want to try but aren't able to because of your gender?

Read this folktale of a young princess who made possible the otherwise seemingly impossible last wishes of her father.

### **A Worthy Daughter** *A Rajasthani Folktale*

Thakur Ari Singh was lying on his deathbed surrounded by relatives and friends. He had only one daughter, Lhalarde, who was standing motionless near her father. The atmosphere was tense. There was no hope of survival for Ari Singh.

As it is customary to find out the last wish of a dying man, one of Thakur's relatives asked him for his last wish, in the hopes that the members of his family could fulfil it. Thakur's lamp of life suddenly fluttered and a light twinkled in his eyes. With a soft smile, he said, "I have seen the ups and downs of life. Many of my wishes were fulfilled and I enjoyed and lived life fully, but I still have two wishes which remain unfulfilled." All those around Thakur spoke together assuring him of fulfilling his wishes and requesting him to spell them out.

Ari Singh mumbled, "My first wish is that you go to Gujarat and fetch horses from there. My second wish is that the famous folksong of Rajasthan, Todarmal be sung in our house." Todarmal is a welcome song sung when a bridegroom comes back to his house with his bride. His relatives suggested that this wish could be fulfilled if he adopted a son, but to fetch the horses from Gujarat was not possible. There was silence all around. His daughter, Lhalarde, suddenly broke this silence and assured him that both his wishes would be fulfilled. Thakur heaved a sigh of relief and in the next moment he died peacefully.

Lhalarde performed all the last rites. The only job left for her to do was to fulfil her father's wishes. She disguised herself as a young man and left for Gujarat riding on a horse. On her way to Gujarat, she came across a Rajput warrior accompanied by a barber. The warrior was also going to Gujarat to get horses. He suggested that since they had a common aim, it would be better to make a united effort. Lhalarde liked the idea and accepted his suggestion.



The King of Gujarat had a select breed of horses which were known far and wide. They were left free to graze in the green pastures of Gujarat near a big tank. A drum was kept there and if anyone wanted to take the horses, he had to beat the drum. Hearing the drum, brave soldiers of the King would come to fight off the aspirant. If the aspirant won, he could take the horses of his choice.

Lhalarde, the Rajput warrior, and the barber were now near the tank where the horses were grazing. Lhalarde suggested

that she would beat the drum and stop the advance of the soldiers. Meanwhile the warrior and the barber could take the horses with them. The warrior and the barber were happy with the plan.

The operation started. Lhalarde beat the drum. The Rajput warrior started gathering up the horses. When the soldiers arrived on the spot with their commander, they found only one person there. The commander taunted, "You are alone, we never fight with a single man."

"You can fight singly by turn, and the result can decide your fate." Still in the disguise of a young man, Lhalarde laughed and then said, "We don't have to decide the issue by fighting a duel. I suggest another way to settle the matter. I will dart my lance into the earth and if your soldiers can pull it out single-handedly, I will accept my defeat."

After the commander accepted this challenge, the lance was hurled into the earth. Each of the soldiers tried to pull it out but did not succeed. Even the commander tried and failed. Lhalarde won and was free to pick out the horses of her choice.

Now Lhalarde joined the Rajput warrior. They agreed to distribute the horses equally between them, but the number was uneven so one horse was left out. The Rajput warrior wanted the young man to have it, but Lhalarde refused and cut the horse into two with her sword. As she slashed it in two, the barber noticed that Lhalarde was a pretty young lady in the disguise of a young man. He spoke to the warrior about it. The Rajput warrior bluntly questioned the young man who readily disclosed the facts and said that she had to do this in order to fulfil the last wishes of her father.

The Rajput warrior was happy to be in the company of such a brave woman and put a proposal of marriage before her. Lhalarde replied that she would only marry him if he would accept her condition – he would have to wear the clothes of a bride and she would go to his house dressed as a bridegroom and carry him to her house after marrying, so that Todarmal could be sung at her house. The Rajput warrior listened patiently and found himself in an embarrassing

**Discuss in pairs reflecting upon the story:**

- a) What were the two wishes of Thakur Ari Singh? Why did they seem impossible?
- b) Why did the Rajput Prince agree to the conditions of Lhalarde?
- c) How does this story challenge your notion of masculine strength?
- d) Where all does this story defy gendered norms?

situation. The barber advised him to accept the condition, as it was his good fortune to marry such a brave woman. The warrior accepted the proposal. Lhalarde married him and took him to her house. The Todarmal was sung by the women, thus fulfilling the last wish of her father. Time passed on. Lhalarde had two sons who were so brave that one day they brought a lion from the jungle, catching it by its ear. Their father felt convinced that it was not wrong to have accepted the condition of Lhalarde.

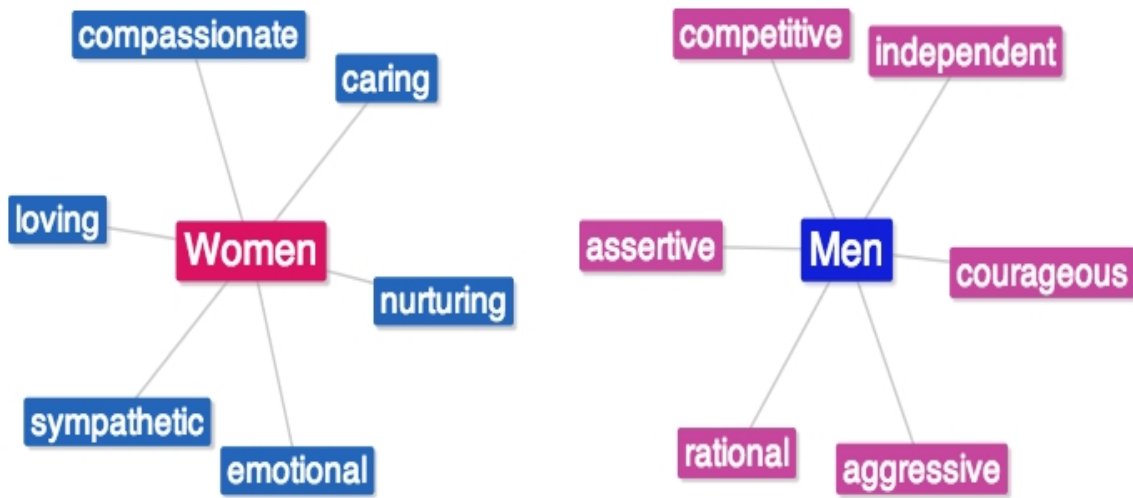
## 2.3 Gender Stereotypes

**Gender stereotypes** are simplistic generalizations about the gender attributes, differences, and the roles of individuals and/or groups. Stereotypes can be positive or negative, but they rarely communicate accurate information about others. Gender has appeared in religious, philosophical, and literary works for centuries. Consider the following excerpts, from ancient times to the present:

- “Woman is more compassionate than man and has a greater propensity to tears... But the male... is more disposed to give assistance in danger, and is more courageous than the female”. (Aristotle, cited in Miles, 1935).
- “To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?” (Mahatma Gandhi, cited in Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, 1960)
- “A man will say what he knows, a woman says what will please.” (Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emile, 1762/1955)
- “Man with the head and woman with the heart; Man to command and woman to obey; all else confusion.” (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1842)



Although the past three decades have brought a new level of awareness about the wide range of roles possible for each gender, strong beliefs about gender difference remain.



The commonest female stereotypical role that is prevalent is of the homemaker. It is imperative for her to put her family's welfare before her own; she is loving, compassionate, caring, nurturing, emotional and sympathetic. The male's role on the other hand is to be the provider. He is also to be assertive, competitive, independent, aggressive, courageous, rational, career-oriented and pragmatic.

These sorts of stereotypes are quite damaging and can hinder an individual's personal and professional growth as well as expression and creativity. According to a research done in the 1960's, researchers came up with a list of what personality characteristics they consider typical of men and women.

*Gender stereotypes significantly attribute to the status quo in terms of women and men's roles. Furthermore, they are one of the most persistent causes of inequality between women and men in all spheres and at all stages of life, influencing their choices in education, professional and private life.*

Suggest some ways to break the existing stereotypes...

<b>Instrumental / Masculine traits</b>	<b>Expressive / Feminine traits</b>
Competent	Empathetic
Rational	Sensitive
Assertive	Passive

Independent	Dependent
Aggressive	Submissive
Strong-Headed	Caring
Dominant	Emotional
Active	Passive
Tough	Gentle
Kind	Cruel
Verbal	Analytical
Tactful	Blunt

Besides these, a list of other gendered lists for physical characteristics (tall, strong, and sturdy for men; soft, dainty and graceful for women), occupations, and activities or behaviours were also tabulated. The variety of these attributes identified as masculine or feminine, till date have a wide acceptance, and their stability over time suggests that gender stereotypes are deep-seated in people’s mind. Do you agree with the characteristics listed in the table? Do they match with what you see around you?

Here are some words and job titles. Can you think of ways you would change these titles to make them more gender fair or neutral?	
Foreman	housewife
manmade	landlord
Repairman	manpower
sportsmanship	cleaning lady

## 2.4 Gender Roles And Relations

**Gender roles** can be defined as the social roles that a person is expected to fulfill based upon his or her gender. These vary in different social, cultural and historical contexts. They vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. Gender –specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions (FAO, 1997)



**Gender relations** are the ways in which a culture or society defines rights, responsibilities, and the identities of men and women in relation to one another (Bravo – Baumann, 2000). Men and women respond to different situations and conditions differently, this is not because of their biological traits but because of their socially and culturally endorsed roles; therefore they ascribe to acquire distinct and diverse sets of knowledge and needs.

Ever since human started living in societies, the differentiation between the male and the female gender and implicated specific lifestyle, duties and functional areas for each of these genders began. In many societies across the globe a differentiation is seen between the roles and relations of men and women.

The socio-cultural norms of a society are instrumental in demarcating the gender relations. They indicate the way men and women relate to each other in a socio-cultural setting and subsequently lead to the display of gender-based power. This develops from the expected and gendered roles assumed by men and women and the impact of their interactions. A good example for this can be 'The family'. In this setting man assumes the provider and decision maker's roles and woman takes-up the familial and childcare roles. These power relations are biased because the male has more power in



making financially, legally and socially influential decisions. Roles, assumed attributes and socio-cultural norms lead to the design of behavioural blueprints. Those who do not conform to these roles we are seen to be deviant as per the societal standards. In most of the societies the family systems are based on the similar structure of such gender roles and it is predesigned these stringently structured roles that rein members of the family to be

in this institution with bound responsibilities.

Gender roles are societal, cultural and personal. They regulate how males and females should think, speak, dress, and interact within the context of society.

Learning reinforced through various societal institutions and plays a role in this process of shaping gender roles. While various **socializing agents**- parents, teachers, peers, movies, television, music, religion- teach and strengthen gender roles throughout the lifespan, parents probably exert the greatest influence. The way in which gender roles are absorbed and assimilated by a group of people describes the influence of society.

The role of a man and a woman in society is influenced by a variety of factors. These factors vary with the region, religion, culture, climate, historical beliefs, ideologies and experiences, across the globe.

## 2.5 Patriarchy

Patriarchy literally means the 'rule of the father'. Within gender studies, the term refers to a social system wherein men dominate over women. Male dominance can be expressed in various ways – for example, within the institution of the family, in the greater rights given to men, through the ownership and control by men of resources like land and other assets.

Patriarchy takes different forms in different social and historical contexts. This is because patriarchy is a system which interacts with – i.e., it is shaped by, and shapes – other systems in society. It operates differently in different communities, economic systems, countries, etc.

### **Shifting gender relations**

*The modern life has very much changed the family structure and the gender roles have been shifting from the traditional structures of responsibilities and roles.*

*These families can be seen taking decisions respecting each other's views, expressing opinions openly, critiquing and encouraging mutually and yet being independent and responsible. The society- defined gender roles are changing with this societal change and many families are experiencing yet trying to cope with the dilemma of the gender roles.*

A patriarchal society is a society controlled, and run by men. Men devise the rules and hold dominating positions at home, in community, in business and government. "A man's world", is a phrase that is used to talk about this. They hold the privilege to listing out rules and dominate in all forums both inside and outside the home. In such a societal setup a woman is seen more as supplementing and supporting a man (behind every successful man is a woman), bearing children and taking care of household chores. This is how it is and has been for ages in many of the cultures.

Feminists used the concept of patriarchy in early 20th century to expound the social arrangement of male dominance over women. The underlying ideology of a patriarchal society is all about the men possessing superior qualities or typical attitudes and traits like - virility, strong will power, authority, dominance, bullying, shrewdness, maintaining confidentiality, social associations and network, action oriented, having a free will, a sense of superiority over others (outlook, race, gender), brute force, belligerence, carrier of family legacy so on and so forth.

Thus in a patriarchal social structure, the patriarch is an elder holding societal legitimate power over a group in the community unit. Men acquires a dominant status not in terms numbers

or in strength but by means of having a more prominent and powerful social position and having almost absolute access to **decision-making power**. It is also related to economics as in patriarchal societies men will have greater power and control over the economy. In such a scenario, because men have higher income and greater hold on the economy, they are said and considered to be dominant.

There are a variety of ways in which patriarchy can be enforced. This may include extortion through violence, physical and mental assault and other forms of harassment, and the demeaning of their efforts to unify and resist. Authoritarian traits are typical of



patriarchal societies and they trust heavily on legal-rational approaches of association, show stronger martial implication and also reliance on police suppression to impose authority. In such a setting it is a general trend to hold contempt for women and for her attempts to liberate herself. In these societies, women are presented with an interpretation of the world made by men, and a history of the world defined by men's actions. For instance, in history when we read about war and conquests, we read more about male warriors, whereas the stories of women are scarcely told. This expurgation of women's lives distances women and fails to provide them with relevant role models.

*How will our societal norms and structures change if it becomes Matriarchal? Try and list the way roles and relationships would differ from what they are now?*

In contrast, matriarchal societies honour women as key decision-makers and they hold the privileged positions as community leaders, where they play a central role in the family, community and in the society. In the few matriarchal societies that exist today women's rights are central; women are given space to express their creativity and participate in society.

Walby's reconstruction of patriarchy defines it as a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. She identifies six structures of patriarchy such as household production, paid work, male violence, culture, state and sexuality. Her analysis of patriarchy has shown the changes which has occurred in history. For example her understanding of patriarchy from private form to public form. Private patriarchy describes the subordination and exploitation of women around family and household. The public patriarchy explains the exclusion of women from public life and reflects various forms of discrimination faced by women in public space. Walby comprehends that patriarchy as change its form, as she puts it, rather than being restricted to the household women have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited.

*(Sylvia Walby OBE, is one of the world's leading authorities on gender. She is a British sociologist, currently Professor of Sociology at Lancaster University. She is noted for work in the fields of the domestic violence, patriarchy, gender relations in the workplace and globalisation.)*

*Read this story by 'Ambai'. The protagonist, in the story, is a feminist supporter. The story is based on her visit to a library, which is full of radical writing. And how she feels and perceives it. The awful state in which the books are dumped, and one final statement at the end, that because of not being able to maintain them, they would be burnt. The books here also act as protagonist much like a character themselves holding narrative, incidences and stories in themselves. There's a squirrel, which operates as a connect between the "mystical and the real", or rather the "dream and real" for the protagonist. The squirrel as a character is rather indicative. It stands for the conscience or the inner voice of the narrator. The shift between illusions and reality and vice versa is made through the symbolism of the squirrel.*

## **The Squirrel**

- by Ambai

Standing with legs planted on facing shelves, his head hidden in clouds of dust, one hand pressed to his throat to control an imminent sneeze, he seemed, as I craned my neck to look at him, a good, obedient genie conjured up with a rub of the wonderful lamp.

"What is there at the top, sir?"

"Dust, dust!"

"No, sir, I mean what books!"

"I'll see, madam. People write many good books without having to do all this climbing. This is rubbish, madam, just rubbish."

"If you like, I'll climb up, sir!"

"No, madam! This is my duty." He let fly ten sneezes.

"These are just women's books. Do you want them?"

"Throw them down, sir."

They fell with a thud. Volumes of Penmadhi Bodhini and Jaganmohini, followed by lots of others. The sight of them crashing through the roof, splitting open even this grew familiar. For someone who doesn't believe in miracles, here was an overdose. As my finger touched the spine of a mended, nineteenth-century book, a tremor rose from the sole of my foot, like an excitement. Anna Sattianandhan on her deathbed, asking her husband to pray and, on the third floor, only the squirrel and me to grieve. The woman who first set out on horseback to spread Christianity broke through the meshed windows of this very third floor. A Bengali girl writing to her father, pleading that he should not sell his only house to meet her marriage expenses, set fire to herself and the killing flame chased through this room, like a snake. The flame spread through the third floor, its shape visible to the squirrel and me. The Telugu cataloguer wasn't there that day.

What had appeared on the third floor were not mere books; they were whole generations throbbing with life. Stately matrons wrapped in nine-yard saris, wearing shoes and carrying rackets, playing badminton with the white women. How best can young women please their husbands? So many sermons on the subject, preaching untiringly.



Addressing her as "my girl," trying to sound kind, they preached the dharma those women should follow. Nallathangal, chasing her son even as he pleads with her to let him go, pushing him into a well, and jumping in herself. A brahmin priest, stubbornly refusing to perform the last rites for a girl because she is an unshaven widow. Knee-length tresses shorn as she lies dead. The devadasis dedicated to temples, dancing to exhaustion, singing, "I cannot bear the arrow of love." Gandhi

addressing women spinning at the charka. Uma Rani of the journal *Tyagabhumi* declaring, "I am not a slave." "Kasini" giving new patterns for bangles in the women's section. The Ananda Vikatan cover girl walks, swinging her arms, while her husband carries the shopping bag. Tamarai Kanni Ammaiyar – the lotus-eyed one – saying, "Let us give up our lives for Tamil." Her real name in Sanskrit: Jalajakshi. Ramamrutham Ammaiyar angrily confronting Rajaji, who wrote: "Gandhi won't come unless you pay him money." They are all here. I am also here. Sometimes they are like wisps of smoke, weightless, shaved, a heaviness in my heart. Razors appear all around. Each lock of hair falls with a harsh sound and rubs against my cheek, roughly. It is only when the squirrel taps his tail twice and raises dust that my senses return. It is leaning on Kalki with Ammu Swaminadhan on the cover. It has finished eating the glue.

I look down through the hole. The librarian's head is leaning against the chair. On the table, a file titled "Subject: String." His favourite file. Three years ago a shining violet file, now mouldy, corners dog-eared. The file began with a letter saying that a string was needed to separate old magazines, here by month, there by year. The letter in reply said, "It is not a practice to supply string to the library; explain the reason for departing from it." Then the explanation: the magazines that are not separated by month are all mixed up and useless. Useless for whom? For researchers. What researchers? Are they from Tamil Nadu or from abroad? The letters piled up. One day the librarian pulled out a bundle of string from his trouser pocket, and then wrote a letter asking to be reimbursed for the string. Which set off a series of letters beginning with the query, "Why a bundle of string?" Every evening the file would make its way to the table. He has not yet been reimbursed.

The squirrel chirps. Keech. Keech. My only link with reality. My companion in illusions. Keech. Keech.

I know. It is late. Your glue is finished. But I don't want to leave these women. A magic string holds us together. I hear them talking. As Shanmuga Vadivu's veena strikes the first note of the octave, the sound leaps to my ear. "Beholding the colourful lotus and seeking it, the bee sings a sweet song, utterly lost," sings K.B. Sundarambal.

"Utterly lost," echoes Vasavambal from behind, accompanying her on the harmonium. On the Marina Beach, Vai Mu. Ko hoists the flag of freedom. With children in their arms, the women who oppose Hindi go to jail.

See, this is another world! That glue should have infused a little of this world into you. A world for you and me.

"Come down, lady." Smiling, he looks up.

"I'm up here."

He comes up.

"The ruling has arrived."

"What ruling?"

"They find all this mending very expensive. Not many people use these books. Just one or two like you, that's all. How can the government spend funds on staff, glue, etc.? They are going to burn them all. All these old unwanted books."

My mind goes blank. At the edge a small thought rises. So the file about the string has finally come to a close. Only the burial is left.

"Come, lady."

I approach the iron stairs and run back to look once more at the room. The evening sun and the mercury lamp spread a strange light on the yellowed books that are to be burnt. Like the initial flood of fire that spreads over the pyre. He turns out the light. The darkness mingles with the dull red light changing everything into a magical flame, deep red. The squirrel, with its legs spread out, lies prone before the window as if in surrender. As I go down the stairs, a little wave of thought. The window faces north.



## 2.6 Feminism

In the broadest sense, the term feminism refers to a set of ideas that recognise that women are faced with certain disadvantages because they are women and the belief that this should not be so. It refers to the political practice that emerges from these, a practice which is aimed at changing the situations of women who face systemic disadvantages.

The term 'broadest sense' has been used to describe this definition because there are different types of feminism, which recognise that in the social world women suffer

*International Women's Day is celebrated annually on the 8th of March. The German socialist and feminist, Clara Zetkin, was the first to propose that women from every country celebrate a day as Women's Day. March 8th marked the day when women workers in textile factories in New York, USA, had protested against poor working conditions and low wages. The first International Women's Day was celebrated in 1911.*

certain disadvantages in comparison to men.

However, the different strands of feminism vary in what they understand the root cause or causes of these disadvantages to be. Some of these different strands of feminism will be examined a little later in this section.

Another common feature of the various strands of feminism is that they do not hold the difference in the social positions of men and women to be based on natural factors. They do not believe that there is anything that women have or lack that makes them inherently inferior to men, or which makes men inherently

superior to women. Instead, the disparities in the social positions of men and women have arisen, over long periods of human history, due to social and cultural factors, and must also be countered through social and cultural means.

This last sentence gives an indication of another very important facet of feminism – it seeks to change those dimensions and systems of society which give rise to inequalities



*Savitribai Phule*

*Savitribai Phule was the first woman teacher in India. She was married at the age of nine, and was educated by her husband, Jyotiba Phule. Phule's father was furious at his teaching Savitribai, but the couple persisted. In 1848 they opened a school for girls in Pune. In 1851 they opened a school for Mang and Mahar girls and in 1853 a home for Hindu widows and their children. Savitribai also started the Mahila Seva Mandal in 1852, an organisation that was aimed at making women more aware of their rights.*

between the sexes. Thus it not only wishes to understand social systems and processes, but also has a commitment to change those that are unjust and discriminatory. In doing so, it realises that the problems that individual women face – violence, exploitation, and discrimination, for example – are caused by broad social and historical factors, and not because of immediate individual circumstances. They must therefore be countered through social changes.

Why is feminism an important concept in the field of gender studies? As has been discussed, in the introduction to this unit, that gender studies is a political field of study. It raises questions of power in society, and asks how the balance of power, which favours one gender, can be shifted and made

more equitable. It is in this way informed by a certain politics, and historically this has been the politics of feminism.



## 2.6.1 Different Strands of Feminism

*In April 2005, UNICEF organised a workshop on girls and school education, where many young girls shared their experiences of schooling. The following is an extract from a report of that conference:*

**Girls in India are demanding greater, sustained support for equal access to a good education....**

Each of the secondary school-age girls at the workshop attended school for at least 5 years despite strong opposition from their families and communities. They spoke of the battle they had faced while trying to go to school; education, they said, had freed them from chains that had seemed unbreakable and given them lives and opportunities that they had once only dreamed of.

Through theatre, art and story-telling sessions, the girls demanded that schools be located closer to home; that they be safe and clean with functioning toilets; that there be qualified, female teachers, and that education be relevant and meaningful, going

beyond the scope of prescribed textbooks....

The proportion of girls who are able to attend school in India continues to remain low in comparison to that of boys their age....The main factors influencing this disparity include poverty and the continuing hold of social and cultural beliefs that discriminate against girls.

*(accessed on 23.02.13 from [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india\\_25979.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_25979.html))*

This report can be taken as a starting-point for exploring the different strands of feminism. The report does not explicitly state that the workshop was inspired by feminist ideals or thinking. Yet it reflects many arguments that feminists would make. One basic feminist argument is that women are not oppressed because they are inherently less capable, but due to social and cultural factors which have developed over time. To correct this, women need to be given the same resources and opportunities that men have. Once they have these, they will have the same advantages that men have, and will have the same chances and advantages that men enjoy.

It is clearly noticeable here that the girls in this extract have not asked only for school enrolment but have also indicated that for them to be able to actually go to school, the school needs to be safe and have functioning facilities. It is only then that the school would be truly accessible for girl students.

Thus, at a basic level, feminism talks about the fact that both men and women need equal rights and privileges.

It points out that for men and women to compete equally, there needs to be a 'level playing field' – a situation where different people have equal chances and opportunities.

Yet other strands of feminism ask another set of questions. They argue that the problem of women's oppression cannot be explained as only one of a lack of equal rights or lack of access to resources. Nor can it be resolved by outlawing gender-based

Think about this point – In many parts of our country, the dropout rate of girls is higher than that of boys. What possible reason do you think there could be for this?

discrimination. Instead, they argue that we must get to the roots of women's oppression. To do so one has to look at the relationship between men and women through the lens of patriarchy. This is a system of the oppression of women by men, and the control of family property and wealth, and women's productive and reproductive capabilities, by men.

The advantage of the concept of patriarchy is that it creates ground to understand the systemic oppression of women. It gives an understanding of the control that is exercised over women. In terms of politics, it points to how measures that seek only to give women access to the things they have previously lacked, are insufficient, as the real problem is not of only a lack of access, but of an oppressive system.

However, various people have pointed to the links between patriarchy and other systems and processes that oppress women in our society. We will examine one such example below.



## 2.6.2 Feminism and Economy

The social world we inhabit is undoubtedly gendered - it is shaped by gender and has implications for people based upon their gender. Feminism has drawn attention to the manner in which it can be seen that the economy is also gendered. There are many examples of this: women's employment outside the home may be concentrated within certain professions and certain types of work, and they may be less likely to own and/or control economic resources and assets.

Feminism has also examined the gendered nature of different types of economic systems – for example, capitalist, feudal, and socialist. Each of these systems had different methods of organising work for the purposes of economic activity.

Scholars of gender continue to study these methods, their historical significance, and the ways in which they contributed to relations of power between women and men. Attempts are made to understand the specific implications that these systems have for women, as well as for men. What advantages and disadvantages do they offer? Do all women share the advantages? How are different women placed within, and affected by, the same economic system?

Many feminists who look to the economy to further their understanding of the oppression of women argue that efforts

like reforming hiring policies, distributing family resources equally between men and women, and having active women's groups cannot entirely produce equality between men and women in the economy. On the other hand, they argue that entire economic systems must be transformed in order to truly liberate women (and men) from various types of economic exploitation. This is because they identify a deep and long history of links between economic organisation of work and income, patriarchal control within the family, and social norms of sexuality and appearance, as the cause for the continuing levels of discrimination in the economy.

*In the 1970s, Bodh Gaya saw a movement by agricultural labourers to reclaim agricultural land, much of which was held by the Bodh Gaya Math. In 1979, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini organised a shibir (camp) where the demand was first raised that the redistributed land be registered in women's names as well as in men's. Why was this demand important? Land is a very significant asset. It is considered a primary resource for the economy, and a source of livelihood and financial security for people. Women made the demand for ownership of land because it would help them to achieve all these things. The lack of ownership of land left them particularly vulnerable.*

### 2.6.4 Feminism and Gender Studies

Feminism is directed both towards understanding society, and also towards changing those aspects and structures society that are unjust and exploitative. It therefore involves both the growth of knowledge and the betterment of the social world. These are not two separate things, but are interlinked aspects of feminism.

Thus the feminist scholar Vina Mazumdar has pointed out that women's studies (the precursor to gender studies) gave feminist activists information and insights which activists needed for their work – for example, information on peasant women and women in the unorganised sector of the economy. Women's studies and gender studies have also furthered the cause of feminism by pointing out biases and omissions in various academic disciplines, for example in the fields of history and sociology. There is, then, a close relationship between the field of gender studies and feminism.

### 2.7 Femininity

**Case1:** Saira is getting married in a few days. Her grandmother is instructing her on how to behave during the wedding – she has to be calm and quiet in front of her relatives, and look shy whenever someone mentions her fiancé. Saira wonders why she should act shy when she does not feel shy.

**Case2:** Neetu's cousin Aman has joined the Merchant Navy. His job sounds interesting and fun – he travels all around the world, visiting so many different places. Neetu is also thinking of the Merchant Navy as a career option after she finishes school. However her uncle discourages her. "How will you manage your family life?" he asks. "You would be sailing for months at a time. Who would look after your children?"

*What does it mean to be a girl? What is the difference between boys and girls? What differences do you see between yourself and your friends, classmates, siblings and cousins of the opposite sex, and what similarities do you see between yourself and people of the same sex?*

If we try to identify the differences between girls and boys, some of the following lines will be heard: Girls are more sensitive and emotional – more likely to get upset, scared,



more likely to cry. They are also sensitive in another sense of the term – they are more aware of other people’s feelings (have you ever heard the phrase ‘female intuition’?) and more caring towards others. They may extend this to an ability to take care of others – in other words, to look after or empathise with people.

Conversely, boys are stronger (physically and mentally) and more authoritative. They are physically

less gentle, perhaps somewhat rough. They may be less sensitive but they are bold and outgoing, rational and practical. They have to be – after all, they have to go out into the world, earn their livings, and support their families.

These paragraphs give a sense of what is generally defined as by femininity and masculinity. As stated earlier ‘gender’ refers to the characteristics that are culturally and socially imparted on the basis of a person’s biological sex.

‘Femininity’ refers to those characteristics that are associated with being female – with being a girl or woman. ‘Masculinity’

refers to those characteristics that are associated with being male – a boy or man.





Look at the two paragraphs again. It can be noticed that when feminine features are described, two things are talked about at the same time – traits and behaviour. In other words, what people are like, and how they should behave. Thus if it is said that boys are rational and practical, they are expected to be rational and practical, and to act rational and practical in concrete situations.

There is also a third facet of masculinity and femininity – it is expected that they will fit the social roles that girls or boys are expected to perform later as adults in their lives. Those traits are inculcated in girls and boys which are thought to be required by them as adults.

What does this last point mean? It means that there are certain expectations of what a person is going to do in his or her life, expectations that are based on whether that person is male or female.

### 2.7.1 Dimensions of Femininity

Femininity refers to the cultural and social construction of what it means to be a girl or woman. What are some of the traits of femininity? Girls are seen as gentle, caring and nurturing, and as having a capacity for self-sacrifice (or of being a martyr) that men do not have. Girls are also supposed to be very concerned about their physical appearance – clothes, makeup, and hair – and spend time making themselves look beautiful. It is also assumed that girls will grow up to marry and have children – that they will at some stage of their lives be wives and mothers.

Of course, these features do not tally entirely

with the traits and personalities of actual girls. There are girls who are forceful and self-



assured; who do not care about how they look; who excel at various sports. There are girls who do not want to get married, and women who have never married and/or had children. There are many types of women, all saying, doing and being a variety of things – how then does the idea of femininity persist?

This question may be answered by recalling that, femininity is a construct based on expectations, both a person's own and those of the people around her. Femininity is a set of traits and behaviour that girls and women are expected to possess. It is in some senses an ideal of behaviour. At times girls are admonished or scolded for behaving in certain ways. An assertive and opinionated girl may be told that her behaviour is unacceptable, and she may be disciplined for behaving thus. In this situation, her behaviour is being compared to an ideal of feminine behaviour.

Look at the first example given at the beginning of this section. This describes an



experience that is quite common – being instructed on how to behave in a certain situation. In this case, a young woman, Saira, is being told that, as a bride, she should behave in a certain way – coy and meek. She should not be loud, boisterous or overexcited. She wonders why – if she doesn't feel shy, why should she act shy? If she is excited about getting married, shouldn't she show it? How would her grandmother's

instructions be explained to her?

Models of femininity are associated with certain roles – those of wifedom and motherhood. It is assumed that all women will be wives and mothers. Parents may begin to prepare for the eventual marriages of their daughters when those daughters are still young – collecting clothes and jewellery, for example. Mothers may tell

stubborn daughters that they should be more adjusting and acquiescent, as obstinacy will not be tolerated in their husbands' homes. Employers may be reluctant to hire a young woman to work for them, assuming that she will not be able to devote enough time to work once she (inevitably) gets married and starts a family. Those working in an office may have to attend a seminar or counselling session on achieving a 'work-life balance' – i.e., on how to manage both work and home life. But these seminars are often only for women – it is assumed that men do not need them as they have a lesser, or no, responsibility towards housework.

This last point leads to an important dimension of femininity. Women perform many different activities in their daily lives. They may be married, have children, look after their households, and also have jobs, participate in voluntary work, and/or have hobbies to which they are dedicated. In other words, women perform multiple tasks. Yet the roles of wife and mother are given primacy. Certain jobs are seen as 'good' for women as they leave women with enough time to devote to their households. School teaching is a good example of this. Also, the characteristics women possess, which are associated with being a wife and mother, affect which career options are deemed suitable for women. Nursing for example is seen as an extension of the caring,



nurturing role of women, from the home, into the workplace. Domestic work is similarly seen as something towards which women are naturally inclined. And yet, this ideal of femininity is actually only available to very few women. For working-class women, staying at home and devoting themselves to housework is not an option. Their earnings are crucial for the

survival of their families. They therefore have very different ideas of adequate

housework and a well-run home from those women who do not work outside their homes. They may also have different expectations of the assistance that they will get from other members of their households, including men, in performing household tasks. The men of their households may be aware that some amount of housework will be required of them. Thus there will be a different division of labour within their households. Nonetheless, should they be able to afford it, these women may also stop working outside their homes; they may take pride in the fact that the men from their households are in a position to support them. Femininity and masculinity are based upon, amongst other things, the social roles that women and men are expected to perform in their lives. In the case of women, the role of full-time wife and mother is something that few women will actually perform. For many women such a role is not possible. (Of course, there are women who may not find such a role desirable.) Nonetheless, as an ideal, it is widespread in our society. It is a model of femininity that is only available to a small section of women, but which is made to seem universally applicable and desirable.

## 2.8 Masculinity

*Case 1- Abdul has been looking at the images in his history textbook. There are many pictures of ancient and medieval kings, Indian and foreign, wearing colourful clothes, jewellery, and even high heels. Abdul thinks of the clothes his father wears to office – shirts and trousers in plain colours like white and grey and black. He wonders, what would happen if his father went to work wearing colourful silks and pearl necklaces?*

*Case 2- John and Meena have met in university and want to get married. However John is apprehensive about discussing their plans with Meena's parents until he gets a good job. He wants to be able to reassure them that he will be able to support Meena.*

The above section spoke of how femininity refers to the social and cultural meanings attached to being a girl or woman, and masculinity to those attached to being a boy or man. It also mentioned some of the dimensions of femininity – that the concept

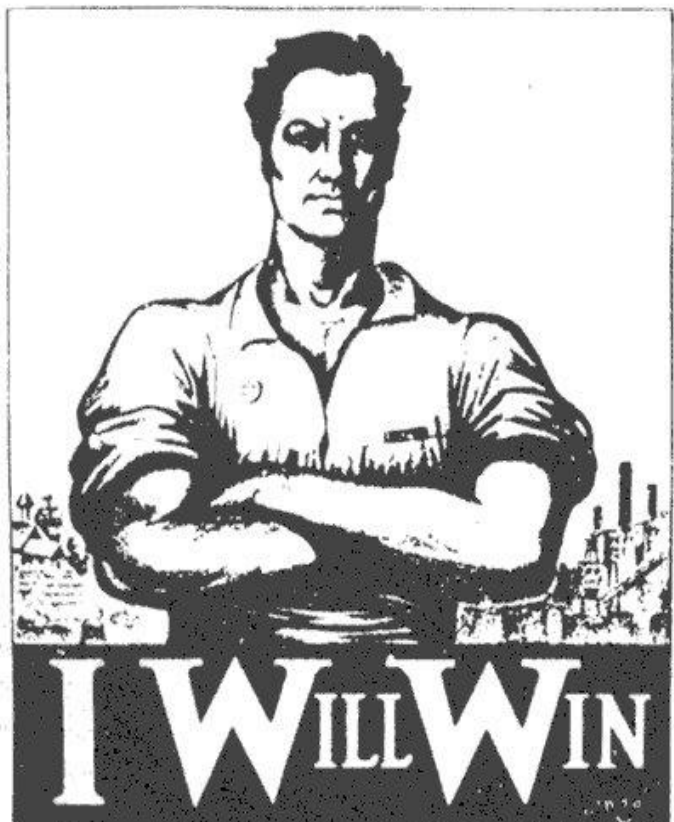
includes traits and behaviours, and that the form that femininity takes is based closely upon the kinds of roles that women are thought to occupy in their lives. Many of the characteristics whose development is sought in girls are based upon the ideals of wifedom and motherhood.

The section also explored some of the dimensions of masculinity, and looked at some traits which are considered to be masculine. These are quite different from those that are considered feminine. Yet there are many parallels between masculinity and femininity, some of which will be examined below.

### **2.8.1 Understanding Masculinity**

What are the features associated with masculinity? Boys are seen as physically strong and powerful, even a little rough, and as being capable of greater physical feats than women. They are also seen as mentally tough, self-confident, outgoing, and even aggressive. In contrast to girls, who are often seen as irrational and impractical, boys are considered to be rational and practical.

As with girls, these are characteristics that are not to be found in all boys or men. All men are not physically stronger than all women. Many physical differences between men and women are not due to innate biological reasons. Men can be introverted and reticent, under-confident and withdrawn. They may not display rationality and practicality in their daily lives. They may be emotional and sensitive. At yet, as is the case with girls, their behaviour



will be guided towards that which is considered masculine. These are in turn based upon certain expectations, based upon certain ideals of masculine traits and behaviour. Boys may be teased for liking things which are considered 'girly' – for example, hobbies (for example, cooking) and toys (for example, dolls) that are associated with girls. Outdoor hobbies and sports may be encouraged. They may be scolded if they display weakness – for example, being afraid of the dark – and be reminded that they should be strong and brave.

What are the roles that such features are expected to complement? What are the expectations that people have from boys, the fulfilment of which will be aided by these characteristics?

These features reflect the idea of a boy or man who has to go out into the world, earn a living, and support him and his family. He then has to be outgoing and capable, not shy and apprehensive. He will have to be focussed on a productive career, and will not be able to afford to waste time on futile, unproductive pursuits. He will have to take the fact that he is a provider, very seriously. It is in this way that manliness is measured in a boy or man's ability to provide for his family.



Masculinity has other dimensions as well. It also includes a certain attitude towards women, particularly women from a boy's own household. Manliness depends also upon a man exercising control over the women members of his household. This control may be exercised in various ways. Brothers may question sisters about where they go, whom they meet; if companions are considered unsuitable, they may be prevented from meeting them. Fathers may

make decisions about the kind of education their daughters will have, and decide till

what level they will study. Major decisions, like if and when to marry, the choice of marriage partner, decisions related to children and their future may not be in the hands of the women concerned. They are kept out of financial matters related to savings, investments, expenditure associated with major commodities. In these ways, men exercise control over women – over their actions, decisions, finances, as well as over their bodies, sexuality, and reproductive capacities. The ability to exercise these forms of control is an important part of the ideal of masculinity.

The above section spoke of how the ideal of femininity does not play out in the lives of many actually existing women. Similarly, many men do not have the considerable resources that are needed to be able to maintain the ideal of masculine behaviour and masculine roles. (This is apart from the fact that many men may not want to live according to these roles and ideals.)

One of the hallmarks of masculinity is the idea of a man as a provider, being able to meet his own and his family's requirements.

However, many men are not in situations where they can support their families without contributions from other family members. Illness and old age may force men to stop working, and look to other

members of their families for financial support. In

many working-class families, women – mothers, wives, and daughters – work outside their homes. Their families cannot afford to have them stop working. In some cases, long-term advantages like the education of children may have to be sacrificed in the interests of the income which those children will be able to earn if they leave school and start working immediately. This will impact the future earning potential of those children – yet families have no choice in this regard. In situations such as these, there is no way in which a man can be the sole earner and sole provider in his household.

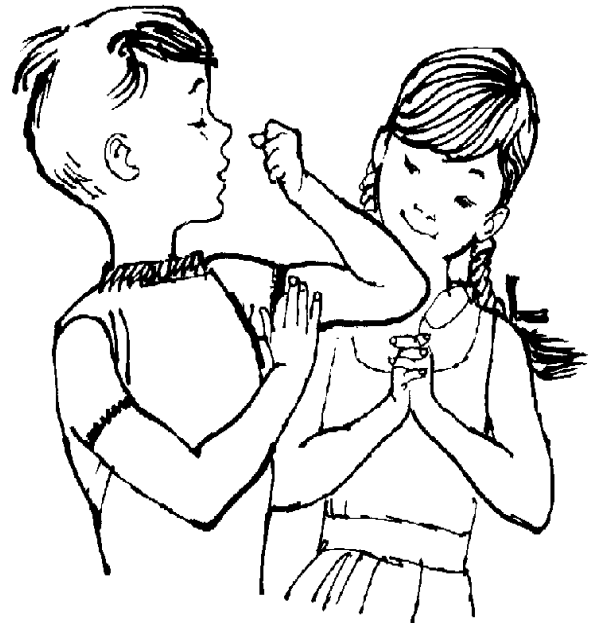
All men are also not able to control access to the women of their households. Physically restricting women to their homes is not an option when those women are employed outside those homes. Men from more powerful communities will be able to get away

List out some cliché/proverbs/sayings from different languages that underpin 'Masculinity' eg: 'Boys don't cry!
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with physical assaults on women of less powerful communities; in these cases, there is often very little that men from less powerful communities can do to either control access to the women of their communities – or indeed, seek justice when assaults have taken place.

In such circumstances, the ‘manliness’ of a man is threatened. He lacks something in relation to ‘real’ men – those men who are able to both provide for and control their families. Yet, very few men would fall into this category – those who have financial and social advantages that most people lack. For others, ‘manliness’ becomes expressed in relationships with those who have even less power. These may be wives and daughters at home, who have little recourse against a violent or abusive father or husband. These may be unknown women, simply walking down the street, faced with men and boys who are eager to show off their masculinity by harassing them.

Therefore, like femininity, masculinity is also an ideal, one that is not, and cannot, be followed by all men in society. Nonetheless, like femininity, the features of such stereotypical notions of masculinity are made to appear to be what being a man is all about. This is because the experience of a limited group of people is generalised and made to seem appropriate to an entire society. The pressure on individual boys and men to conform to this ideal is immense. To be thought of as something less than a man is humiliating. In fact, that may be where much of the desirability of the masculine ideal lies. Thus boys must display the features of masculinity, endlessly, until it becomes a second nature to them.





## 2.9 Gender Discrimination

Discrimination faced by a person because of their gender can be termed as 'Gender Discrimination'. The unequal treatment of girls in society contributes towards hierarchies that exist at all levels. These biases not only exist inside the homes and families but also in public institutions and other parts of the social structure. The means

*Suman was 13 year old when her parents told her that now she would not be going to the private school her brother is attending. They told her that it would be difficult for them to pay high fees for both of them. Suman could not understand why even after performing much better than her brother in academics she would not be continuing with her studies from the same school. She had already conceded to her parent's instruction of not playing in the evening and helping her mother with household work, whereas her brother was admitted to a football coaching academy.*

**In the above case, try to recognize the areas where a female is likely to face discrimination in the society. Recognize similar practices and try to list the possible reasons behind them.**

of these biases can be based on physical, economical, cultural, psychological etc. factors. These differences are not natural but they are socially constructed in a patriarchal society which legitimizes these practices and makes them acceptable; also, those who deviate from them are subjected to tremendous social pressure to conform.

The discrimination has become part of the life cycle of a woman. It starts right at the time of conception, where the chance of being born is taken away from a many. This has lead to a female-male ratio of approximately 0.93 in India. Food and nutrition is a major concern in India, with many women receiving inadequate food and nutrition. Getting proper health care is

also a luxury for many. Many women are from a young age, conditioned to surrender to the will of their parents in all the aspects. May it be kind of education they would get or other basic facilities, lot of them get a secondary treatment. Early marriage and dowry have been issues that are yet to be uprooted from our sociological context.

Discrimination against women may manifest itself in both overt and covert forms. But

the source of majority can be traced to lack of awareness, cultural, social and religious beliefs, practices etc.

This life long discrimination may be openly practiced and easily recognized in most situations but sometimes a closer look is needed to observe it. Nevertheless the consequences always remain lethal for not only the individual but also for society at large.

**There are certain questions that need to be answered:**

- Should biological difference matter while defining social roles and responsibilities?
- If girls fair better than boys in academics why do we have lesser literacy rate of girls?
- Why should the boys be given so-called “masculine” tasks and girls “feminine”?
- If the women around the world constitute approximately half of the population and their participation in all spheres including work force is more than that, why do they own less than one tenth of the total wealth?

The negative treatment met by an individual or a section/group of the society is something that may also lead to deprivation of their basic rights. This discrimination may not just be in the overt for but also in covert form at different levels. It may not only be females that face this gender-based discrimination but also by men in some cases. Whenever one category is treated superior and the other as inferior it becomes a source for discrimination. Discrimination based on gender may differ in different situations but the root lies in the ideology and how people think. The economic dependence of some women on men encourages men to exercise control over women. At some places the cultural values glorify subservience of women and are considered

to be mandatory.

The forms in which the women face the bias in rural and urban areas may have some differences but most of the time they have similar causes. But it is important to consider some of the examples that are observed at various places.

- Lower salaries are paid to women workers as compared to men for the same job.
- There are practices in families where the menstruating women are not allowed to be part of religious procedures.

*“Suhana and her husband were working in the same multi national organization where she was paid lesser wages than her husband for the same profile. Still she always wanted to continue her job after marriage as she was reasonably happy with it. But after few months her mother in law started pressurizing her to stop going to work. She also forced her to bring more money from her parents for the renovation of their house. “*

Analyse the case given above and come up with possible reasons behind the series of event depicted above and their best possible solutions according to you. A debate in the class can be taken up to further the discussion.

- Women may work for whole day in the fields to raise the crop but are not allowed to sell it. And ultimately it would be the male member who would be called the breadwinner for the family.

- When distribution of assets in family is done it is between the men.

Pre-natal selection, female foeticide, dowry and physical harassment are some examples of violent manifestations of discrimination that are found across the cultures.

The worst-case scenario is when social and economic discrimination both are practiced together. It is important to recognize such cases in society and come up with solutions.

### **2.9.1. Gender Discrimination in the Context of Power**

The degree of control exercised by certain people/institutions/organizations over material, human, intellectual and financial resources can be defined as Power. The control of these resources becomes the source of power. It is dynamic and relational and exercised in the social, economic and political relation between individuals and groups. It is also distributed unequally where some individuals or groups have greater control over the resources and others have little or no control. The access to and control over

resources determines the extent of power one exercises. Different degrees of power are sustained and perpetuated through social stratification like gender, class, caste etc.

Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways:

- power over: This power involves an either/or relationship of domination/subordination. Ultimately, it is based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation, it requires constant vigilance to maintain, and it invites active and passive resistance;
- power to: This power relates to having decision-making authority, power to solve problems and can be creative and enabling;
- power with: This power involves people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals;
- power within: This power refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how can individuals can recognise through analysing their experience how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this. (Williams et al, 1994).

## **2. 10 What is Empowerment?**

The mid 1980s saw the term empowerment becoming popular in the field of development especially in reference to women. Empowerment of woman, in its simplest form, means the redistribution of power

that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. It is both a process and a result of the process.

Empowerment essentially entails the transformation of the structure or institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources. However, empowerment for women begins in the household with equality, autonomy and respect. Achieving equality between men and women in the family is the foundation on which empowerment in other areas is based.

The concept of women's empowerment throughout the world has its roots in the women's movement. It implies struggle, that is, learning to deal with the forces of oppression. With a vision of a new society, it involves a conscious and deliberate intervention and efforts to enhance the quality of life.

The process of empowerment is both individual and collective. It is through the involvement in groups that people most often begin to develop awareness and the ability to organise, to take action and bring change. Thus, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in the decision-making (power and control) and transformative action.

The most conspicuous feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word 'power'. It implies control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type-physical, financial such as land, water, forests,

labour, money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, sustain and institutionalise specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behaviours. This control, in turn, confers the power of decision-making.

However, power is not likely to be handed to the "have not" group in the society as a charity. Power must be developed or taken by the powerless themselves, as well as being generated. Power has to be acquired and once acquired, has to be exercised, sustained and preserved.

*Manpreet was married for eight years and was afraid that her children would suffer if she took a divorce from her husband who never allowed her to go out of her home. She wanted to earn by working as she felt it was becoming very difficult to manage her house in the irregular money her husband was earning as a factory worker. When her 6-year-old daughter was also subjected to physical abuse by him she ultimately decided to stay in a separate home with her three children. She got a loan from government to buy a second hand car. Today she is one of the few women taxi drivers who are independently taking care of their families.*

How do you view the above case in light of the steps taken by Manpreet and scaffoldings that helped her becoming empowered in the situations?

Empowerment as a process helps in gaining higher share of control over different possessions and ability to make decisions. Although empowerment as a concept has been associated with anybody who has been deprived or marginalized but when it comes to women the need is more impinging due to the various forms of discriminations they faces. The gender relations that are unequal at most of the places can be addressed by empowerment. For the development of a nation it is important that social equity is at the core of its national objectives.

As discrimination is not only outside but also inside the home, it is imperative that empowerment takes place at both the places. Autonomy and ability to take decisions on your own is first step towards women empowerment at household to challenge the patriarchal ideology. Education of girl child without discriminating has been supported a lot by

Try to recognize what are the areas in which empowerment can bring change in the present scenario at different places. Deliberate the areas amongst peers.
--

policies at different level. When at work place the possibilities of discrimination are at both micro and macro level that may be addressed not only by balancing the economics but also by reservation.

Women's right movement across the boundary has shaped the concept of women empowerment that challenges the oppression. It is not be possible that the shift of power that has been practiced since so long would take place swiftly for equalization to be possible. The power has to be developed inside those who are deprived. The strengthening can be done through different ways that may have one important function sustainable development.

### **2.10.1 Equity and Equality in Gender Relations in terms of Women Empowerment**

*“Gender equality matters for development - it is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative.”* (Source-

“Gender Equality and Development” (2012), World Development Report)

Gender inequality is a universal fact of life. Women are systematically discriminated against the backdrop of patriarchal ideologies and values. The inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors-economic, social, political, education, health care and nutrition, legal is evident. Rural women suffer from being both economically and socially 'invisible' despite their important and substantial economic roles. This is because of the perception that women are not relevant to the wage and market economy. Excessive workload, lack of proper nutrition and health care, repeated pregnancies, poor education, lack of access to economic resources, deep-rooted social biases against them mark the lives of the majority of women, particularly the women belonging to economically weaker sections. The process of empowerment will imply transformation of gender relations within the family and the society that is equality of status and of opportunities of sexes need to be accepted and implemented in its entirety.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal

List out at least ten ways in which you can practice gender equality in your class/family/community?
--

enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision- making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on nor constrained by their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and

access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive, reproductive and social life.

### **2.10.2 Modes Of Empowerment**

Empowerment can be done in different ways and in different areas. Although most of these areas are interdependent, the efforts are required in specific field for practical implementation. Economic support and social empowerment cannot be seen devoid of participation and intervention of political avenues. Similarly education and health can be clearly seen as interdependent while seen as a tool for women empowerment and capacity building. Constitutional and legal provisions are present in all the areas for giving opportunity to overcome the barriers. The integrated approach to empowerment is required for balancing the gender relations in the society.

**Comment on the following statements that deal with ways of empowering women and develop a list of your own:**

1. Training of women in vocational skills should be mandatory from secondary level education.
2. Mobilization of female workers should be done to equip women to develop independence.
3. Development of positive self-concept is critical for moving away from misconceptions in the society.
4. Women should get additional benefits of health care nutrition at all stages.
5. Village level efforts are equally important for empowerment of women at national level.

The sex ratio and increase in literacy rates are some of the statistical indicators that would reflect the change in the society as result of empowerment efforts.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to



be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42). In spite of these measures women discrimination in India is not rooted out. Social commitment and political will has a significant role in uprooting the discriminatory practice against women.

*The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) launched on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010 aims to strengthen the overall processes that promote all-round development of women, who constitute 48% of the population of the country. It is widely acknowledged that despite affirmative actions taken by the Government of India and various State Governments, indices depicting the status of women show that more needs to be done. It has also been realized that the necessary tool to achieve the desired outcome is to develop effective mechanisms for convergence on systemic issues and incentivize convergence in flagship programmes of the Government, to begin with and has been emphasized in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP approach paper.*

*The NMEW is therefore, positioned to play a critical role in creating an enabling social, institutional and policy environment for taking women's empowerment issues to a level of scale necessary for India's next stages of development.*

### **2.10.3 Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj**



**THEY HAVE ARRIVED:** These aren't girls on a village holiday. They are members of India's first girls' 'samras' (unanimously elected) gram panchayat at Siswa in Gujarat's Anand district. Eleven of them, aged between 19 and 26, make lives better for the 5,000 residents, setting an example in gram swaraj which would have made the Mahatma smile. Ever since they came to power last year, they have completed projects worth Rs 1 crore that include toilets, roads and computers for schools. Siswa has elected a woman sarpanch for the last 15 years. Says Shailesh Patel, a former sarpanch, "Women convince better. So, we decided to appoint young, educated girls with fresh ideas." It's working.

Source: Times of India

*73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of constitution in India has given lot of provisions and these have very important implications for women's empowerment. Reservation of one-third of the seats for women in panchayats that were given constitutional stature is one of them. At present there are more than 1 million women panchayat members in India and many of them are young members. This increase in participation has not only helped individual transformation but also collective transformation. Although there are positive instances of such transformation but at numerous places it has faced lot of resistance. The example of Panchayati Raj is an example of positive step towards empowerment of women. Looking at the given text try to find different variables associated with such movements. Also find out details about different movements in India that could be termed as examples of women empowerment movements in recent past.*

#### **2.10.4 Implications of Gender Equity and Equality**

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the



realization of human rights for all. The overall objective of gender equality is creation of a society in which women and men have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the

distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; and share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence either at home, at work or at any other place.

## **2.11. Gender Mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels.

The concept of gender mainstreaming was first proposed at the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The idea has been developed in the United Nations development community. The idea was formally featured in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Most definitions conform to the UN Economic and Social Council formally defined concept:

*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.*

United Nations has defined Gender Mainstreaming as- *the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels.*

It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. Gender mainstreaming is not only a question of social justice, but is necessary for ensuring equitable sustainable human development by the most effective and efficient means.

## Unit End Reflections:

1. According to you, how different are boys and girls? Write your views.
2. Read the following statements and tick the ones that show gender bias.
  - a) "Sit properly; you are a girl." \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) "Being a boy doesn't mean you can talk loudly." \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) "Boys can stay out late, not girls". \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) "Both boys and girls must help clear the table." \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) "Boys should hide their emotions." \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) "Both boys and girls must fight against injustice." \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are there some jobs that you feel only boys/men can do, or some that only girls/women can do? List them and say why you think so.

Things only boys/men can do	Reasons
Things only girls/women can do	Reasons

4. Has someone ever stopped you from trying something you really wanted to do because you are a boy/girl? How did you feel? What did you do?
5. Name a famous personality that you admire because he/she had the courage to break free from traditional roles based on gender. Would you consider this person a role model? Why?
6. Write five things that you can do to end gender bias.
7. Circle the answer that is closest to your own understanding.
  - a) Gender is
    - An ideology
    - A branch of feminism
    - A way of looking at things
  - b) Women are oppressed because of:
    - Male dominance
    - Historical reasons
    - Women who are struggling for women's rights
  - c) Gender awareness:
    - Leads to conflict between men and women
    - Brings the current conflicts between men and women to the fore
    - Helps find solutions to the conflicts between men and women
  - d) Gender is an urban concept and is not relevant to the rural context:
    - Totally agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Do not agree

## Comprehension Questions

1. Is gender socially constructed? Substantiate your arguments with suitable examples.
2. Explain, gender stereotypes as a product of society and culture.
3. What do you understand by patriarchal society?

4. What is masculinity and can all men in the society follow it? Why/why not?
5. Define the idea of feminism and describe its different strands.
6. What is femininity? Describe its various dimensions.
7. How is Gender discrimination practiced in society? How is the idea of power related to it?
8. What do you understand by women's empowerment?
9. Highlight the significance of women's autonomy in promoting gender equity and equality in the context of social development and human welfare.
10. Why is gender mainstreaming required for economical development?

## Research and Portfolio

1. You read 'The Squirrel' by Ambai in the chapter. Ambai. (C. S. Lakshmi ) is a Tamil feminist writer and independent researcher in the field of Gender Studies. Some of her famous titles are:
  - The Face behind the mask : Women in Tamil literature, Stosius Inc/ Advent Books Division (1984)
  - A Purple Sea (Translated by Lakshmi Holmstorm), Affiliated East-West Press (1992)
  - Body blows: women, violence, and survival: three plays, Seagull Books (2000)
  - In A Forest, A Deer: Stories By Ambai (Translated by Lakshmi Holmstorm), Katha (2006)

Read any other story written by her and write a review.

2. Identify and create a collection of folk-tales with the underlying theme of Women Empowerment/Equality/leadership. (To be taken up as a whole-class project)
3. Create an anthology of poems written by female/feminist writers in 19<sup>th</sup> Century. (To be taken up as a whole-class project)

## Recommended Readings

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Wadley, S.S. (2002). *One straw from a broom cannot sweep*, in Mines, D. & Lamb, S. (ed.) *Everyday life in South Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.