SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Social construction of Gender is a sociological theory that examines the manifestation of cultural roots, mechanisms, and corollaries of gender perception and expression in the context of interpersonal and group social interaction. Gender roles, according to social construction of gender theory, are an attained "status" in a social environment that implicitly and overtly categorises persons and hence motivates social behaviors. Gender has long been recognised as an important component of human identity that influences society roles, expectations, and opportunities. Gender is a multifaceted social construct that varies throughout cultures and societies, rather than a fixed biological feature. This article investigates gender as a social construct, with a focus on India and similarities to other countries. Gender, as a crucial component of human identity, has a significant impact on cultural norms, expectations, and possibilities. Gender is a sophisticated social construct that varies among cultures and countries, rather than an innate, biologically determined attribute. With a focus on India especially, this essay examines gender as a social construct and compares it to other countries. Gender as a social construct challenges the notion that gender is primarily determined by biological sex. Instead, it focuses on how cultures define and value gender, which has an impact on people's roles, actions, and social connections. By examining the social, cultural, and historical factors that influence gender norms, we can learn more about the intricate relationships between gender dynamics in various countries. Gender stereotypes and expectations are part of the social construct of gender. The gender-based features, attitudes, and duties that society expects of people are typically restricting and simplistic. These prejudices have the potential to reinforce inequality while also limiting people's options and opportunities. Women, for example, are supposed to be caring, submissive, and in charge of domestic tasks in many nations, whereas men are expected to be powerful, assertive, and primary breadwinners. These gender stereotypes have the potential to perpetuate unequal power dynamics and keep people from realizing their full potential.

Key words: Sex, gender, Social Construction, Indian Society, Sexuality, Self and identity, Gender Identity, Gender Role, Gender Inequality

Introduction

While gender and sex may be synonymous to the layperson, sociologists view these terms as unique, value-laden categories. Sex is just the term used to describe an individual's fundamental biological identity as either male or female. On the other hand, gender refers to both the biological sex male or female and the role expectations associated with that biological identity. An individual's biological identity is innate, but the role expectations associated with it are formed from an early age by the actions of different social forces. They display this learned habit all of their lives. Gender identity is shaped and ingrained in individuals by outside organizations.

.   Similar to other social realities, gender equality is a cultural construct that is contingent on a broader context, potentially carrying different meanings in different countries. What is the mechanism by which this gender construction process functions and is sustained in society? In this unit, let's attempt to investigate this. Prior to continuing to study gender and social construction in further detail, it's crucial to understand the origins of the concepts of identity and self. The reason for this is that, whereas some countries have advanced to the point where males are expected to renounce their socially acceptable gender privileges in order to promote equality, others are still fighting to give women the same possibilities as men. Therefore, what individuals want when they ask for gender equality depends on the socio-cultural context of the community in question.

India, a primarily collectivistic society with strong patriarchal roots (Khurana, 2018)[1], is currently at a turning point in its history where traditional gender norms and egalitarian goals converge. This will not only determine how gender parity develops in India going forward, but also how women's increased participation in paid work will likely contribute to the country's socioeconomic growth in the years to come. Finding India's current place on the gender equality spectrum with the facts and data that are currently accessible is definitely a difficult undertaking. Although women's participation in the workforce has increased over the years, it is still far from equal (Mehrotra & Sinha, 2019)[2]. This improvement does not always translate into improved gender parity. First off, a significant number of female students choose to discontinue their education upon reaching puberty due to a lack of menstrual hygiene products. Those who do finish school frequently have to make compromises in their career choice because of things like workplace proximity and safety. In addition, working women in India are still expected to handle household and child care duties by themselves in addition to their paid jobs.

This is a major factor in the fact that most working women in India feel more pressured than their male counterparts to handle work and family obligations simultaneously (Rajadhyaksha & Velgach, 2015)[3]. Similarly, after marriage, it is typically expected of the woman to resign from her work and move. Women also have to deal with obstacles in the workplace, such as the glass ceiling, maternity harassment, and wage gaps. Consequently, it is clear that gender disparity in India is a complex issue that cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of statistics information about women's engagement in the workforce, enrollment in higher education, etc. Since the issue is ingrained in our social system, a culturally specific explanation is necessary. This qualitative analysis's major goal is to investigate the Indian conception of gender equality and the influence of cultural norms on how we interpret the discrimination and inequality we encounter on a daily basis.

Sex: Sex is defined as the physical and physiological attributes that indicate a person's biological maleness or femaleness.

Gender: Gender highlights how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and the results of psychological, cultural, and social aspects that a person acquires as they develop into men or women. Gender is a socio-cultural construct, whereas sex is a natural phenomenon.

Sexuality: Sexuality is a biological phenomenon. It alludes to the anatomical distinctions between the male and female bodies. The terms "masculine" and "feminine" describe traits, roles, and behaviors. Gender is changeable, but sex is constant.

Self and identity: The concepts of self and identity are frequently debated and defined and explained in several fields of social science. Self is defined as an individual's conscious, reflecting personality in total, whereas identity is defined as an individual's distinct personality that is considered as a lasting entity. Self and identity difficulties are widely exploited in symbolic interactionist ideas. According to interactionist thinkers, the self reflects society, which means that culture shapes the self, which shapes social behaviors. For them, society and the individual are disorganized, unitary, and insecure. The structural symbolic interactionists, on the other hand, see societies as highly differentiated yet organized systems of interactions and relationships that span a wide range of intersecting lines based on socioeconomic class, age, gender, race, and religion and more. In this view, the self is multifarious, made up of a range of aspects that are sometimes linked

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[1] *N. Khurana: Evaluating the evolution of patriarchy in India and the West, International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies,(2018)*

[2] *Towards higher female work participation in India: what can be done? Santosh Mehrotra and Sharmistha Sinha January 2019*

[3] *Rajadhyaksha, U., & Velgach, S. (2015). What is a better predictor of work-family conflict in India?—Gender or gender role ideology.*

and sometimes independent of one another, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes antagonistic, and that are organized in a variety of ways. Each component is an identity developed outside of the self based on role expectations.

Thus, the self is conceived of as a collection of separate identities or internalized role designations. For example, the self is the sum of a series of identities such as gender, caste, race, class, and so on, as well as the role expectations associated with each identity. We interpret identities as self-cognitions linked to roles, and then to positions in organized social relationships. It is also believed that the significance of identities varies. A given identity can be invoked in a variety of scenarios or characterized as differential probability. Thus, the choice between or among acts that indicate specific roles reflects the relative position of the identities linked with those roles.

Gender Identity and Gender Role Construction

Individual self and identity are said to be socially constructed. As individuals in a society, we envision or invent numerous social processes or occurrences, as well as our own social identity, depending on our daily experiences. Observations, experiences and encounters with other folks in other society. Individuals from diverse identities based on their encounters with other people. The sense of community and fellowship is directly related to the concept of an individual's social identity. The community and the people with whom an individual self-identifies and associates have strong influences. Gender is acceptance of self as female or male sex, as well as the roles and expectations in this sense linked to that sex as one of an individual's identities is mostly established and shaped by her/his social interactions. The social construction of gender identity is inextricably linked to the culture and institutional arrangements of the society in which it works. As a result, we can conclude that gender identity is a culturally specific discursive construction, and cultural identity is constantly constructed (Hall 1990)[4]. This means that gender identity is culturally and socially created, with variations throughout time and geography.

Gender Roles and Gender Equality

Gender refers to the social and cultural expectations that are put on people of either sex. It refers to the disparities in characteristics and possibilities connected with being female or male, as well as the social interactions and connections that exist between men and women. It establishes what is expected, permitted, and valued in a woman or man in a specific situation. As a result, the term gender does not only apply to women. As previously said, it relates to the social and cultural implications assigned to a specific sex. Gender identity is thus relative to external forces. Gender defines men and women in society and influences the roles they play in life. People do not always have the same gender identity. Gender formation identifies differences not only between males and women, but also between women based on sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and so on. Gender provides a collection of frameworks for explaining the social and ideological formation and portrayal of sex difference. As a conceptual tool for analysis, it has been used to emphasize numerous structural linkages of inequality between men and women as exhibited in employment markets, political systems, and home. Gender equality means that men and women, girls and boys, have equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities. Equality does not imply that men and women are equal, but rather that men and women have equal chances. Rights and responsibilities are not and will not be determined by whether they are born female or male. Gender inequality occurs in most countries, which means that men and women have different roles and duties, different activities, different access to and control over resources, and different decision-making possibilities. The amount of gender differences and gender inequality varies by society, based on the nature of the gender roles allocated in that community. As a result, the nature of gender roles and gender expectations varies among nations since they are socially constructed. In reality, the gender role structure is complex.

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[4] *Understanding cultural differences / Edward T. **Hall** and Mildred Reed **Hall**. Available at W.A.C. Bennett Library (Burnaby) Stacks (HD 31 H229 **1990**)*

Gender roles

i) attribute certain psychological qualities to the two sexes ii) assigns specific and separate activities, domains of work to the two sexes with the assumption that the specific activity is necessary for the survival of the societal system iii) regarded differently by nations and society, giving women a lower status. In this context, the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's [5] observation that "women are not born, they are made" rings true. That is, a person is molded to match the socially constructed picture of manhood or female. Gender construction refers to the process of socializing the image of womanhood or manhood. However, the social construction of gendered identities is variable because of the changing relationships humans have with the idea of the self, bodies, nature, and ways of experiencing and comprehending the world at a given historical period. Our identities, as well as the meanings linked with them, are in flux. Gender identities might thus be violated, for example, through political activism. Let us now examine the concept of social construction.

Social Construction of Gender Roles

Every day, we notice diverse objects, witness a variety of events, and engage in a variety of exchanges. Some of these phenomena may be new, while others may be old or continuing from the past. We form or construct an image for each of these separate phenomena. We form our own perceptions of the world around us and see these things accordingly. The social construction of reality is built on this everyday sense of objects (Grey, E.D. 1982)[6]. Social construction is a continual process in which both individuals and society as a whole participate. Each and every structure is influenced by the individual understanding of the social actor with whom she or he interacts, which obviously has a subjective bias. Society is utilised to legitimize specific social constructions in order to project the subjective bias of groups and classes as reasonable, broad-based, and acceptable. As a result, the social constructions through which we perceive our everyday experiences make moral judgments, and categories other people based on religion, gender, caste, and so on are culturally driven and may be changed. They shape and are shaped by societal norms, values, conventions, beliefs, and so on. Social activities such as socialization and education also contribute to the persistence and acceptance of a certain type of social construction. Gender is a socially constructed construct. Thus, the cultural creation of masculine or feminine gender roles is socially constructed, and such constructed roles can change as time passes. In contemporary society, such social construction of gendered roles imposes differing expectations on men and women. It creates unequal positions for males and females, with females being submissive or inferior in all sectors of life.

Gender Inequality and Gendered Role Construction

Gender is seen as a social, historical, and cultural creation constructed on sexual distinctions and the links formed between both sexes, according to the preceding section. Gender construction is multidimensional. Gender construction has its roots in social, cultural, institutional, economic, and historical aspects of society. This gender construction defines the range of choices or possibilities available to women and men. These options are related to employment and the manufacturing process, mobility or seclusion, attire and behavior, and so on. As a result, the sexual division of labour in society and the allocation of family roles, property and inheritance, authority and governance distribution, and, most crucially, the unequal concentration of power and authority on social gender. The standing of women and men in society reflects the patterns of gender construction. It is vital to remember that gender categories are not equal in any of the societies. While there is an argument in some civilizations for the complementarily of gender specific roles, this argument does not hold up under scrutiny. Women and men frequently form hierarchies in terms of resources, influence over decisions, and societal judgment of positions. Thus, gender construction

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[5] *Simone de Beauvoir* (1908–86) was a French existentialist writer. She is known for her treatise The Second Sex (1949)

[6] *Gray, Jeffrey A.; Neil McNaughton (1982). "The neuropsychology of anxiety: An inquiry into the functions of the septo-hippocampal system.*

of femininity and masculinity supports and sustains unequal sex status, resulting in an inferior role for women in society. This uneven and subordinate status leads to female sex discrimination and marginalisation in society. In our society, social institutions such as family, caste, religion, and so on are powerful agents of gender construction. Let us examine the role of some of these institutions in the formation and institutionalization of gender roles.

Conclusion

All social activities are a matter of social construction, and these constructs evolve and are implemented based on societal values, norms, traditions, and conventions. However, these social practice structures are not necessarily value neutral. This is due to the fact that most of these constructions are tied to power relations in each culture and typically serve the social, economic, and political goals of dominant groups within it. The same holds true for gender roles. Gender roles are formed socially. Because the creation process is culturally distinctive, it is founded in the ideological and institutional systems of each community. The goal of this section is to define and explain how the social construction of gender identity and gender roles works. The unit opens with an explanation of the concepts of self and identity, as well as how the individual self functions. It goes on to explain how the social construction of gender enables and legitimizes women's subordination through numerous social processes and social institutions. The final half of the material attempts to demonstrate that, while the Indian social structure, particularly Hindu religion, portrays women as symbols of strength and meekness, it ultimately attempts to regulate her sexuality, thereby reinstalling women's inferior status in society. The Indian government has been working hard to better the lives of women and girls, and numerous projects and schemes have been put in place to help. Economic progress and overall female empowerment are taking place. There is also the sad reality that crime against women is on the rise. While women are making strides in education and employment in India, their safety and survival remain a challenge. We must all advocate for equal rights for men and women. Both are a part of our culture. Without them, society would be incomplete.

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