



GENDER DISCRIMINATION : SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT



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Abstract :

The present paper aims at a deep concern of gender discrimination that has to be redefined in a socio-cultural context and deeply rooted patriarchal sex role ideology. Gender inequality is a product of social construct. Nowadays, the world has become gender sensitive due to recently highlighted a gang rape in Delhi, dowry deaths, malnutrition, subordination, exploitation of women in the stereotypical socio-political systems.

Gender bias is not a product of eco-political framework. It is a materialization of prejudice deeply rooted in our patriarchal society. It simply shows a male-dominated power and privilege at large. In a sense, women are powerful human resources in the development of our nation but unfortunately their contributions go simply unnoticed and neglected as they are supposed to

perform the different roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother. She is to do all the household and domestic chores willingly or unwillingly. It also challenges male power and privilege at large. Therefore, the focus should be on the laws and practices frequently made in this country. The status of women has to be determined on the basis of social and political ideology and the role that a woman is obligated to play in economic and public affairs. Why the difference is made needs to be taken into our serious consideration. Today, 'Save a girl child' is a cry of all the nations.

Therefore, the serious attempts are being made to bring out gender sensitization in our country.

Keywords : Gender, socio-cultural context, law, inequality, ideology, socio-political system

Research Paper :

The present paper aims at a deep concern of gender discrimination that has to be redefined in a socio-cultural context and deeply rooted patriarchal sex role ideology. This is the time where redefinition of gender and difference becomes decisive and fruitful. First, our perspectives of gender equality should be changed that leads our nation to progress and prosperity. The focus is essentially on the material needs of women including education, role, status and rights.

Gender inequality is not only a biological difference but also a social construct. The world seems to be a gender sensitive today because of recently highlighted a gang rape in Delhi, dowry deaths, malnutrition, subordination, exploitation in the stereotypical socio-political systems. Media repeatedly brings out all socio-political issues forth concerning subjugation of women, plight and predicament and asks for justice in the country.

“Rape is not only a crime against the person of a woman (victim), is a crime against the entire society. It destroys the entire psychology of a woman and pushes her into deep emotional crises. It is a crime against basic human rights and is violating of the victim’s most cherished of the fundamental rights namely the Right to Life contained in Article 21.” (Supreme Court in *Bodhisattwa Gautam Vs Subhra Chakraborty* (1996)1, SCC, 499.)¹

A woman is a mute sufferer of endless miseries. They have been treated as a ‘second sex’, a traditional, social subordination to men. She simply needs a properly balanced socio-economic status.

It needs to be noted:

“Gender is not a fixed unchanging entity that is naturally derived but is intimately linked to particular social and historical contexts. Although generally disadvantaged, a woman’s position is dependent on the interplay of a variety of social factors such on age, caste, class, ethnicity and race and her capacity to negotiate with the system. Whenever these factors, singly or jointly, mediate unequal gender relations, women’s subordination gets sharply accelerated.”²

Gender bias is not a product of eco-political framework. It is, in fact, a materialization of prejudice rooted deeply in our ideological thinking. It simply shows male power and privilege at large.

Supriya Chaudhuri points out :

“The consciousness of gender runs through the texts which encode our cultural existence, there can be no easy theoretical solution to the problem of how to read the human subject – if, indeed, there is a subject at all.”³

It is significant to focus on how the subjugation of women is reinforced. Broadly speaking, women are held subordinate to men. However, in fact, women are powerful human resources in development of the nation and unfortunately, their contributions go unnoticed and neglected as they have to play different roles like a daughter, wife and mother. She is stuck in a unique social framework, that is, to cook and produce children. She has to do all the household and domestic chores. This is nothing but a gender role difference in the socio-cultural context. The commonly accepted notion about women is the voluntary and involuntary work to be assigned to women traditionally whereas men generate income to support the family. Therefore, serious attempts are being made to bring out gender sensitization in our country. It ensures well-being of women and youth mandated by the government circulars reaching out many people. It aims at uprooting the threat of gender-based violence in the society today.

“Women are now leaving the four walls of their houses to venture out in search of work. The underlying factors responsible for this are numerous depending on their socio-economic status. The majorities of women who are going for such jobs belong to middle and lower socio-economic class and they primarily work due to sheer economic necessity. This is particularly true of women who belong to the lower socio-economic class.”⁴

Women are to look after children while men just become a source of economical stability. As we, all know that sex is biologically determined where as gender is absolutely a social construct. A gender perspective is needful that helps to develop the nation. It also challenges male power and privilege at large. Therefore, the focus must be on the laws and practices frequently made in the country. The status of women has to be determined based on social and political ideology and the role that a woman is obligated to play in economic and public affairs.

Simone de Beauvoir denies physiological sex difference. She is not biologically determined; in fact, she has different experiences from as a woman. She interrogates, “Why is woman the other?”

de Beauvoir sums up her position as

“It is only in a human perspective that we can compare the female and the male of the human species.”⁵

In this context, the question of individuality and freedom naturally arises as a male and female domination. None of them can be called superior or subordinate. They are just the entities of a new life production. Are they free at the time of gamete formation? Of course, yes. It means they retain their own individuality and freedom in a biological sense. This may lead our discussion towards freedom of male and enslavement of female. Still, the enslavement that a woman naturally puts into is a manifestation of separateness with a new species into her womb. Although she has to undergo a biological process, she retains her own freedom and individuality, which a man possesses naturally.

“Her findings, in brief, are: Among microscopic one-celled forms, multiplication is fundamentally different from sexuality. Each cell divides and subdivides by itself. In the vast majority of species, male and female individuals cooperate in reproduction. They are defined as males and females by the gametes they produce, sperms and eggs, respectively. It is only in the secondary and superficial phenomena upon which fertilization depends that it is the male element which provides the stimuli needed for evoking new life and it is the female element that enables this new life to be lodged in a stab

organism. Neither gamete can be regarded as superior to the other when they unite. Both lose their individuality in the fertilized eggs," she continues, "the male is free while the female is wrapped up in the species."⁶

Man is biologically free but woman has to undergo through serious complications like pregnancy, childbirth and long illness. Truly, she is vulnerable having fewer blood corpuscles in body. She also has less lung capacity. The biological difference has to be taken into serious consideration. The physiological weakness of women is different from the concept of weakness. It has its reference to social, economic, psychological and moral considerations. de Beauvoir does not believe in psycho-physiological parallelism. She strongly asserts the fact that

"The life the individual is not decided by the dictates of biology, but by the conventions of the society."⁷

Beauvoir considers man, woman as natural and passivity as the characteristic of the feminine woman. The supreme power gives births as male and female. Both have their own individuality and freedom. They are also equal to their rights. This never leads to the question of superiority in a so-called male dominated society. Human should be treated as humane to bring out gender-equality in our nation. Who is dominant or subordinate? A male or female, the question takes us to intellectual debate where the quality elapses with social and economic imbalance in the country. Any nation in the world can have its own progress with the equality of gender, which always probes tremendous potentialities of both male and female. Life is for us and we are not for life. That is the reason why all the argumentations keep the question aside and generate negativity in us, which ultimately causes a great hindrance to the progress of nation. Who makes the difference? Is it a male or female domination? And for what the difference is made needs to be taken into our serious consideration. It needs to be clarified at the earliest. 'Save a girl child' is a cry of all nations. It is so because the destiny of being male or female is determined by the society. Woman needs a cultural space to form her own social and national identity. Gender and difference is a ubiquitous note found in feminist readings and writing that has to be exposed in the context of historical and social reality.

Jasbir Jain opines :

"In traditional societies women have been constrained by social constructs and have been vertically divided into family units, relating to the outside world through their men being governed by their positions, or lack of communication, or the failure of their dreams? How have they reached out to others in relationships and to their own inner beings in situations of operations? And how have they defined themselves, honed their languages, related to society? These and a host of similar questions crowd one's mind."⁸

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