
UNIT 1: UNDERSTANDING GENDER RELATED CONCEPTS

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Each discipline has specific concepts. The learners need to learn and get clarity about these concepts for detailed study. The concepts dealt in this Unit are related to the Course ‘Gender Sensitization: Society and Culture’. These concepts are not only for this particular Course, but will help learners pursue further studies related to the discipline Women’s and Gender Studies and Gender and Development Studies. The Indira Gandhi National Open University offers postgraduate Programmes in Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS), Gender and Development

Studies(GDS). There is an opportunity for the learners to pursue postgraduate programme in gender studies after getting familiarity with the concepts and issues through this Course. Along with explaining concepts, we have given some exercises and Case Studies to get more clarity. The learner may not get much explanation about these concepts in the rest of the Units. So, they can go through these concepts carefully to clear their concepts before they start reading other Units in the Course. The concepts explained in this Unit are sex and gender, gender roles, masculinity, femininity, patriarchy, gender- based violence and sexual harassment.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you would be able to

- Define the Concepts related to the Course; and
- Discuss and elaborate on the concepts related to them to everyday experiences.

1.3 SEX AND GENDER

What is sex? What is Gender? How to differentiate between these two concepts? Why is it important to distinguish both these concepts? Let us know about the concepts sex and gender. Sex is the biological differences between female and male, at a basic level. Human beings are either born as male or female for the most part, although there is a very small segment of babies that present a mixed anatomical distribution. Biological differences of female and male reflect in the chromosomes (Male chromosomes are XY and Female Chromosomes are XX), sex organs, hormones and other physical features. We need medical interventions in order to change the sex. When we think of biology and biological difference we also need to keep in mind that biology like other areas of knowledge is also not absolute or fixed. The instance or occurrence of intersex should make us aware of the dangers of biological essentialism.

Unlike sex, gender is socially constructed. Let us see how this social construction happens once the baby is born. Social structures such as family, society and other socio-cultural practices determine differences based on the sex of the child. The differences include clothing, behaviour, social role, position, identity and responsibility. In this way, gender is constructed and practiced.

Let us examine the terms sex and gender using examples and real life stories. When a new born baby arrives, the entire family celebrates with enthusiasm. Celebration differs based on sex

differences of the new born baby. First the family and society determine clothes for the baby following a pattern of colour-coding. If it is a female child, they tend to buy pink clothes and toys related to cooking and dolls. At the same time, if the child is male, they buy blue clothes and toys like car and bike. The family and society also creates conditioned responses which are different for female and male children. The little girl is called a pretty little angel and the little boy is told to be brave and strong and not cry since crying is seen as a female attribute. In this way gender is constructed from the moment a child is born.

Gender is also constructed in different societies in different ways. They mainly focus on the expected roles to be played by the female and male. For imposing these roles on male and female child, the socialization process plays a significant role. The differences include productive and reproductive roles, paid and unpaid work, power relations and politics. We will discuss different roles (Gender roles) and power relations in detail in the next section. Gender roles and codes can be questioned by changed by deconstructing existing roles and relations of men and women. Society imposes certain roles on men and women. Social structures limit women to act only in certain ways and carry out roles i.e. productive and reproductive roles. For example, society imposes reproductive roles on women like caring and nurturing. Social structures make women realize that they are more suitable for reproductive roles than productive or community roles. The following case study gives you different pictures.

Late Kalpana Chawla wanted to be an Astronaut/ space scientist after completing her engineering in India. Due to her insistence, her parents allowed her to go to the United States (US) to become an Astronaut. Like her, Ms. Pavithra wants to be a pilot after completing her 12th Standard. She comes from lower income strata. Her father works as a bus Conductor in the State Transport Corporation. She has to fight at two levels. She needs to find necessary financial resources to pursue her passion to become a pilot. Secondly, she has to convince her parents that she can also operate a flight like men. She does not want to study female centric profession.

The above real life case studies showed how gender is constructed and how women can reverse their productive roles. Both the women struggled at multiple levels to convince family and other social structures to pursue their passion. They proved that productive roles are gender neutral. Both men and women can do all types of work. The expectations adhere to gender related behavior, roles, identity and professions are called gender stereotyping.

Let us now read some common stereotypes related to gender.

Table 1.1 Common Gender Stereotypes

Female	Male
Dependent	Independent
Weak	Powerful
Incompetent	Competent
Less important	More important
Emotional	Logical
Implementers	Decision makers
Housekeepers	Breadwinners
Supporters	Leaders
Fearful	Brave
Peace makers	Aggressive
Cautious	Adventurous
Soft Spoken	Outspoken
Reference: Prof. Vibhuti Patel, M.A programme SNTD Women's University The above mentioned gender stereotypes can be reversed and its suitability to all human beings (men and Women) depends upon their personality. You will read about it in detail in section 1.9 of this Unit.	

Activity 1

To understand Sex and Gender in more clear way, choose to visit few expectant mothers. Please ask them whether they want to have girl child or boy child. If they give preference for girl child, please ask them to list the reasons. If they want a male child, please request them to give reasons for the same. Match them with some given below or add to this list.

Some of the possible reasons are given below:

Table 1.2

Sl.No	Girl Child	Boy Child
1.	Takes care of household work and other siblings	Support family economically
2.	Involved in reproductive works like caring and nurturing of elders	Less expenses for the marriage
3.	She is Goddess of Wealth and light of the family	Performs last rites for the parents
4.	Entire family can restrict her mobility. Decisions can be taken by the family on behalf of her	Heir of family Once he matures he becomes head of the family in patriarchal traditions.

Activity 2

Answer the following statements that describe attributes related to sex/gender in Yes/No

1. Women are soft and men are tough
2. Women can conceive and men cannot
3. Women breastfeed their babies; Men feed milk in bottles
4. Childbearing is responsibility of mothers
5. Men take decisions
6. Men have moustaches and beards and women do not
7. Women can earn only 70% of what men earn
8. Women give birth and men don't
9. Women cry easily and men don't cry easily
10. Women menstruate every month

11. Boy's voice breaks in adolescence

12. Men are breadwinners/ head of the household.

(Adopted from MGS-003 gender Analysis Block 1 Unit 1)

Let us now read what we understand by gender roles.

1.4 GENDER ROLES

As we already read in the previous section, biological differences between sexes do not normally change unless there is a medical intervention. However, women and men perceive their own characteristics, roles and responsibilities in a particular way which does not flow out of sexual difference. It is assigned to them based on the perceived differences that is, it is a social construction. These roles differ in different societies based on the cultural system that is prevailing there e.g. patriarchy. Gender roles demand that activities assigned to men and women are based on these differential perceptions. The role differences similarly lead to selecting occupations. The term “Division of Labour” used in gender literature to indicate roles and responsibilities of men and women. So, gender roles are purely assigned and not based on their skills. Broadly speaking, men roles are related to economic activities and it is accounted in System of National Accounts (SNA) while women's roles are related to care and nurturing. These may not be taken into account in SNA. However, men may not perform domestic work.

According to Caroline Moser, Women are triply burdened in most of the developing countries. They perform three types of roles i.e Reproductive, Productive and Community Managing and Community Politics.

Reproductive Roles include child bearing, child rearing, taking care of elders in the family and household work. Along with reproductive roles, women perform productive roles as secondary income earners. The economic activities performed by women are not accounted as economic activities. It is not included in System of National Accounts (SNA). The productive roles include part time economic activities, agriculture wage earners, taking care of milch animals and involving in informal sectors in urban areas.

Apart from the above two, women are involved in community managing and community politics. It is considered as an extension of productive work. The activities and roles include provision and maintenance of community assets for collective consumption. They are also involved in

health care and education of entire community. Community roles and politics performed by women are not paid. Unlike women, men do perform community politics and activities, but they get paid either as cash or kind.

In many societies, women also carry out productive activities such as maintaining of small pieces of land/ agricultural plots for farming systems and animal husbandry. These tasks are often not considered as work and are often unpaid. Women may also perform many roles which attract wages in both the formal and informal economic sectors. But women's economically productive roles, in contrast to men's, are often undervalued or given relatively little recognition.

Gender roles and responsibilities vary among cultures and can change over time. For example, in India, unskilled labour is considered "women's work" while in Africa it is "men's work." In Europe and the United States, the contributions of men in domestic activities are becoming increasingly important and visible. Based on the roles and activities of men and women, the needs of the women and men differ. Identifying roles and needs and incorporating the same in plans and policies are important.

Before reading ahead, take up the following exercise to assess your understand of the concepts you read till now.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1:

Note: i. Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii. Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.

1. Explain the concepts sex and gender

Let us now read about what is understood by masculinity and femininity.

1.5 MASCULINITY

The word Masculinity derives from Latin word 'masculus (male person/male) and masculus (male). The word first used in 14th century to denote 'male sex'. The word used more to refer the characteristics of men. The masculine characters are powerfulness, strength, force, manhood and manliness. The scholarly work on masculinities in 1960s and 1970s understood that the perceived and internalized attributes determine masculine identity. The cultural norms and values

acquired through socialization process may influence the acquiring of masculine characteristics like aggression, ambition, analytical ability and assertiveness. The scholarly paper written by Raewyn Connell in 1979 (Connell 1983), discussed the social construction of bodies in the boys. Boys give importance to sports in the school years. They concentrate on development of physique, force and strength. He further elaborated that the drive towards developing masculine attributes among boys and men is an important part of the socialization process.

1.6 FEMININITY

It is culturally constructed collection of qualities, behaviours, appearance, attributes, features, characteristics, postures associated with women. It is not natural but is constructed and socially produced. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1949) wrote that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’. According to Judith Butler in the performativity theory, the repeated acts of performance create the illusion of femininity that becomes naturalised and constructs gender and feminine qualities/identities. The study on femininity concentrates on neo liberalism, culture, caste and other social structures and how these structures inhibit women’s freedom, opportunities, oppression and gender inequalities. For example, women are the driving force behind employment in European Union recently. Still there is gender gap in pay parity (www.ec.europa.eu; European Commission). The following table gives you the picture of gender inequality in India.

Table 1.3 Gender inequalities- Some facts in India

Demographic Profile				
Population	Unit	1991	2001	2011
Total	Crore	84.6	102.9	121.1
Female	Crore	40.7	49.6	58.7
Male	Crore	43.9	53.2	62.3
Sex Ratio				
All India		926	933	943
Rural		938	946	949
Urban		893	900	929
Life expectancy	Years	2001-05	2006-10	2011-15
Male		63.1	64.6	67.3
Female		65.6	67.7	69.6
Literacy rate (7+ years)	%	1991	2001	2011
All		52.21	64.84	72.99
Male		64.13	75.26	82.14
Female		39.29	53.67	65.46
Higher Education	%	1950-51	2005-06	2013-14
Total		N.A	11.16	21.1*
Male		N.A	13.5	22.3
Female		N.A	9.4	19.3

Reference: India Figures 2015, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

***provisional**

The evidence shown in Table 1.3 clearly shows that gender differences and inequalities persist at all levels. Majority of the world poor are women across the globe. Also, the evidence from Esther Boserup work on African Agriculture pattern in her book “Women’s Role in Economic Development” clearly brings out women’s involvement in food production. But ownership of land is with men in most of the societies according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

1.7 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISTINCTION

The public private dichotomy forces women to be confined at home and restricts their movements. It further enforces women to perform domestic roles as care givers and nurtures. Public and Private dichotomy has important consequences for women's material independence and access to education. Questioning of public and private has been central to women's struggle for suffrage & equal participation in other spheres of life. Private relates to the activities within domestic realm and public comprises of activities situated outside of domestic sphere. Feminists consider this distinction hierarchical and patriarchal. This division leads to women's subservient roles and status. The separation women to private sphere because of her reproductive roles and locate men in the domains for economy, business, politics and law is in public sphere.

1.8 PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is defined as rule of male/father. It is considered as an institution. The patriarchal institutions perpetuates domination of male and subordinates the female. The dominant power relations operate at different levels in the society and discriminate against female and girls at all levels. This discrimination not only leads curtailing of opportunities and undermining of women's agency, it may produce violence against women. Patriarchy further demarcates and insists that the private sphere is for women and the public sphere is for men. The public private dichotomy forces women to be confined at home and restricts their movements. It further enforces women to perform domestic roles as mother and wife. It also restricts women from entering politics/ decision making level. These restrictions have important consequences for women's material independence and access to education. Patriarchal norms are prevalent in social structures like family, society, politics, government, media and religion. In the patriarchal society, the inheritance of wealth passes to the son and it is called patrilineage. In the patriarchal tradition and patrilocal system, women are supposed to come to husband's house and live there after marriage.

Let us now read about gender stereotyping in the following section.

1.9 STEREOTYPING

Gender stereotyping is nothing but reinforcing feminine and masculine qualities and attributes again and again. We have already seen masculine and feminine qualities and characters in

sections 1.5 and 1.6. Gender stereotypes are beliefs which prescribe what men and women should and what they can do. It can be changed over period of time. But, changes are very slow. We can see few examples of gender stereotypes. Women are supposed to be caring and nurturing, kind, warm and they should be interested in children. The above said qualities are perceived for women in most of the societies. The qualities like intelligence are valued in both men and women. In the South Asian Societies, women should be presentable and dress properly and they must be proficient in household chores. With regard to profession, girls in Asian societies are encouraged to take up traditional professions like teaching or medicine predominantly, which are related to reproductive roles. i.e caring and nurturing. Other qualities prescribed for women as gender stereotypes are physical appearance. Society expects women to be thin. But there is no gender stereotyping on men about weight. Rudman and Fairchild study in the year 2004 showed that men who scored high in feminine knowledge test, declined to share their score. Due to gender stereotypes, the process of role reversals for men and women is slow and they are conflicts in the performance at different levels. Media especially print and visual media (Television) and cinema contribute to gender stereotyping. Most of the commercial cinemas and television serials portray men with masculine qualities. Women are mostly shown as dependent and they perform reproductive roles in popular cinema and television.

Read the following case study and write about your perception on gender stereotypes.

Case Study 1

Saloni Malhotra is founder of company called “DesiCrew”. It is a socially motivated business process outsourcing (BPO) company. It provides Information Technology enabled services (ITes) to the rural area. The service delivery centres of the company operate in villages. Her company first train the youth in rural areas on computer operations. After that, trained youth will be appointed in the company. She perceived that the rural youth migrate to cities for a job. She wants to address the rural urban migration. Saloni is from Delhi. Her parents are doctors. Unlike her parents, she studied engineering. Her parents encouraged her to start a business to provide job in rural areas. They never pressurized her to get married or asked her to start a family life. Instead, they encouraged her to first establish her career. After stabilizing professional life, they asked her to consider family life. She put her energy to start her dream project “DesiCrew”. Saloni says “My desire to work in rural India was reconfirmed at the engineering college when

one of my colleagues at the college, Pallavi from rural Maharashtra, one day proudly told me; she was going to study Computer Sciences. Later, I learnt that the poor girl had very little access to a computer. She just believed that studying Computer Sciences would help her get a well-paid job and the benefits which follow. Pallavi made me realize that she and I had one thing in common; we lack exposure in each other's worlds. When we think of jobs for rural areas, we think of agriculture or handicrafts and ignore opportunities in high-tech areas. Young graduates from arts, engineering and commerce flock to cities to find jobs. Could we move the jobs to these people....." Most employees in DesiCrow are females. Female employment opportunities in rural areas increase self esteem of girls. This encourages more parents to invest in girl's education in rural area.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i. Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii. Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.

1. Give two examples of gender stereotyping in men and women.

2. Define masculinity and femininity.

In the following sections you will read about few more concepts that would help you to understand in a broader perspective.

1.10 FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement. It started after questioning the inferior status of women. The movement demands equal status for men and women. It is also an ideology that works towards empowering women. It is a collective conscious. Any individual or collective can strive for gender equality, gender equity and fight against oppression, injustice, exploitation and violence against women. The term 'feminist' is first used in French medical text in 1871. Feminism is

classified based on the movements that emerged in various historical periods. The period for first wave feminism was late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During that period, they fought for women's suffrage. The second wave feminist activities were in 1960s and 1970s. They concentrated on women's equal rights in family, at the workplace and on sexuality. In the beginning of 1990s, the third wave feminism started and it is continuing till now. Feminisms and feminists are categorized into liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, psycho analytical, post modern, eco feminism, feminisms of colour.

1.11 GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is 'the differential expressions of violence according to own sex, race, class, religion, sexuality, ability and other situating factors'. The 'battered women' movement of the 1970s which came up as part of the second wave feminism contributed much for the emergence of the concept GBV. The United Nations (UN) decade for women and feminists were instrumental in addressing the GBV issues at a global and national level. The four international women's conferences recognized violence in private and public sphere and gave a broader policy outlook. This makes the national governments to bring necessary policies to address GBV.

1.12 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It is gender based discrimination at workplace. Intimidating others through unwelcome sexual advances and creating hostile environment in the work place are also sexual harassment. This includes showing sexually coloured objects, touching, teasing, demand for sexual favour, showing pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. Sexual harassment affects victims badly. A study conducted among 500 respondents and found that more than half had experienced sexual harassment at workplace in Singapore (Aware, 2008). Unit 16 of this course will elaborately deal with Sexual Harassment at workplace.

1.13 EMPOWERMENT

Naila Kabeer defined "empowerment as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". She elaborates three dimensions of empowerment: (1) resources (conditions); (2) agency (process); and (3) achievement. In the process of empowerment, both women and men take control over their lives. They set their own agendas. They gain skills. They build self-confidence. They solve their

problems and developing self-reliance. The following case study further explains the concept of empowerment.

Case Study 2

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) was founded in 1990. The meaning of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan is “the Organization for the Power of Laborers and Farmers” in Hindi. The Organization is founded by three social activists. It located in one of the most backward areas in the state of Rajasthan, India. MKSS works for ensuring the proper implementation of people’s rights among the poor. The members of MKSS are predominately from the low socio-economic strata. They belong to small and marginal farmers and landless labourers. The organization works for bringing transparency and accountability in the local administration. The activities of the organization include ensuring the payment of government-approved wages for workers. It mobilized people and conducted community and village levels meeting such as demonstrations and jansunvais. They organized meetings several years. A jansunvai is a participatory social audit in which government officials are brought face to face with citizens in a public gathering. The village people, especially daily wagers in government projects and applicants of antipoverty plan ask questions and verify official government’s records. If they find discrepancies, they pose questions to the officials. The officials are bound to answer in the meeting itself. Such jansuvais often result in public exposure of the corrupt practices of officials. Giving people a voice to raise locally relevant issues and demand transparency in administration leads to their empowerment. The efforts of MKSS contributed significantly to the implementation of the Right to Information Act in Rajasthan. Its success has inspired people in other Indian states to demand the passage of a similar Right to Information Act in their states. MKSS continues to work toward exposing corruption and increasing public accountability among government functionaries, and its work in fighting corruption for more than a decade has earned MKSS global recognition and support.

The above case study is adopted from the World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPowerment/0,,contentMDK:20269087~menuPK:543261~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:486411,00.html>

1.14 SUMMING UP

In this Unit you read some important concepts related to the Course ‘Gender Sensitization: Society and Culture’. After reading these concepts you would be able to understand implications

of gender in your day to day life. This understanding will also help you to learn about gender privileges of those who are powerful in our society and how vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society are deprived of their rights.

1.15 KEY WORDS

Socialization: It is a process of transforming a biological being into a social being. An infant is a biological entity at the time of birth. In the process of socialization the biological entity acquires gender traits of becoming boy or girl.

Social Structure: It includes social institutions (for example family, marriage and Kinship), Social practices (rites and rituals) and Social Processes (Socialization and Assimilation/ Modernization).

System of National Accounts: The System of National Accounts (SNA) consists of a coherent, consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts, balance sheets and tables based on a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules.(ref: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India).

1.16 REFERENCES

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1.17 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Define and discuss the concepts sex and gender with suitable examples
2. What are gender roles? Give a few examples in your daily life.
3. What is patriarchy? Give a few examples
4. What is feminism? What are its various strands?
5. Explain the term empowerment with a suitable case study.
6. Examine Masculinity and Femininity prevalent in your family.

