GENDER ISSUES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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In India, gender issues got attention in the decade of 1970's when attention was placed on the gender context of development within the academic discourse. Things have changed radically since the UN Declaration of 1975 as Women's Year, followed by UN Decade for Women (1975-85). It was only in the decades of 1970's and 1980's that serious efforts were made to introduce gender issues in academic research on the one hand, and on the other hand, women as a political group have also attained respectability in India. Globally speaking, it was the time when feminist consciousness has emerged as a new force worldwide. A ground for debate on gender has been provided by the publication of the Report of the Government called 'Towards Equality', which brought into focus the marginalization of women as well as the cultural bias against them. This publication which is called a benchmark indicated the beginning of a new phase in the women's movement. This report not only offered a reality check on the condition of women in India, it also unraveled the disenchantment of women with existing modes of development and the process of modernization (Mazumdar, 1985: 5-6). The decade of 70's had initiated a serious debate on the issues related to women in India. In an effort to have a systematic and rigorous analysis regarding women's situation in India, both Indian and international foundations have allocated special funds for the promotion of research on gender issues. An unprecedented development took place in early 80's (1981-1986) when Madhuri R. Shah, (known as Madhuribehn) a women's activist and academician became the Chairperson of the UGC (University Grants Commission). Soon thereafter, many Women's Studies Centres were introduced in various universities by the University Grants Commission. These Centres

'were designed to act as catalysts for promoting and strengthening women's studies through teaching, research, curriculum, field and extension work, training and continuing education etc. The Centres have carried out their work not only in the above areas, but also

in the areas of gender equity, economic and self-reliance, girls' education, population education, issues of women rights, laws, social exploitation, awareness activities, etc. They have been instrumental in incorporation of women's studies in various courses of teaching as well as facilitated research on socially relevant areas. They have provided consultation to scholars, evaluators for development projects, generated resource materials and documentation of the regions of their locations, counseling, collaboration and networking both within and outside the university system' (UGC Guidelines for Universities and colleges).

The number of these Centres had increased since1986. There are more than 100 Centres now in India where the under-graduate and post-graduate courses are offered along with the research on women's subjects. As per the UGC, these Centres 'have practically succeeded in playing an interventionist role by initiating gender perspective in many domains in generation of knowledge; in the policy designs and practice etc.' (UGC Guidelines for Universities and colleges). The introduction of these Centres opened a new terrain which broke the dichotomy between the classroom and the movement as has been pointed out by Devaki jain that 'It is the typical offspring of a movement for justice, recognition and emancipation from subordination. It embraces within itself, academia and action, theory and practice, voices and scripts. It has been a powerful tool for calling attention to the intellectual and ideational skill of women across the world…' (Goyal, 2015: 7). The scholars of women's studies got involved in the process of challenging the philosophical underpinning of human knowledge and thereby creating new knowledge by giving voice to women's ideas and proposals in all domains (Raput and Jain, 2003). Women Studies Centres have played a significant role in building up the discipline of Women's Studies in India. Women's Studies Centres have also had more responsibilities than other disciplines in the University system since they are routinely called upon to conduct gender sensitization activities beyond the confines of their centres, to engage with several disciplines and departments in order to mainstream gender in other discipline, to serve on sexual harassment committees and to actively engage in advising and implementing the host of legal and policy measures related to gender that have proliferated in contemporary times. To be precise, Women's Studies Centres are significant due to its outreach into the society at large.

Women's Studies emerged in India out of the awareness that the knowledge generated with regard to women and gender by the standard disciplines of social science and humanities had failed to reflect or address the concerns and questions of the new consciousness of resurgent women's movements. The earlier paradigms of knowledge production could neither inform policy requirements for gender justice, nor provide analytical perspectives on the difficult and complicated social, economic, and political processes and outcomes that were being shaped by the interaction between gender and development. These women's Centres which are defined as 'powerhouses and catalysts' by pioneers in the theory and practice of the Indian women's movement, have expanded the parameters of debate and discourse.

Since the mid-1980's, gender issues became the focal point of research not only in the Women's Studies Centres, but in Social Sciences. Realizing the importance of women's studies as a critical perspective, the need was felt to integrate it with all the broad disciplines within the realm of social sciences. Social sciences have both an objective and subjective dimension. Post-modernists have felt the need for an objective social science discourse in the last five decades. At the same time, there is a growing and inexplicable demand for inter-disciplinary studies in social sciences. Taking this as our fundamental hypothesis, this chapter sets out to achieve the basis of gendered discourses in social sciences. It seeks to bring out the inter-relationships and inter-linkages between gender and the broader social science discourses. This becomes apparent as the feminist discourses and the associated notions of gender equality and women's empowerment are widely discussed within the various academic disciplines of social sciences in the contemporary world. Along with the Sociology and Anthropology, gender issues were researched in History, Political Science, Economics and Language based studies. The purpose was to unravel the multiple points and areas of inequalities prejudices and discrimination that women face and power relations underlying the same; to know how the intersectional systems of inequalities are challenged by counter discourses and varied social movements discussing power, violence and justice. This could lead to new methodologies of enquiry and newer understanding of agency. It can be said that over the years, feminist discourse expanded to a large extent which includes the interrogation of disciplines, policies, institutions, making indepth analysis of gender subordination and the ways and means of

countering it, analyzing the judicial pronouncements and judgments and of course, the data collection methodologies adopted by the national data agencies.

In sociology, emphasis has been placed on the oppressive social reality, and the questions taken up for research include women's identity vis-a-vis rootedness in the family, caste, class and community structure. In social anthropology, research has been undertaken to understand the implications of kinship and cultural codes of status and honour in kinship behavior, the resultant withdrawal of women and purdah in its various manifestations. In economics, development related problems have been analyzed including those relating to agricultural and agrarian sectors. In psychology, research is related to the concern over the hold of traditional, religious and mythical ways of thinking about women. In politics, sufficient attention has been shown in women's role in national movement, presence of women politicians, and low level of political participation, etc. (Chowdhary, 1994). As a result not only primary research is being done and primary data being collated, but also a conceptualization of gender issues and gender theory being evolved. In fact, in social and political theory, gender theory made a lot of intervention.

There is a need of evolving gender perspective, while probing the gender issues in social sciences. The gender perspective helps in understanding gender inequalities in gender related issues. Although, over the years awareness about gender issues has increased, yet there appears to exist a general skepticism about such issues. While women continue to face oppression, the gender sensitivity which is essential to fight such oppression and marginalization has not developed properly. The liberal democratic framework of the Constitution, the whole gamut of progressive laws, the opening of educational and employment avenues has not contributed in changing the lot of women. The long struggle for women's rights and consistent and varied forms and levels of engagement of women's movements with the state for equality, liberty and justice for women have revealed that the dream of ensuring constitutional rights of all women across different social groups is still a distant dream. Women's marginalization is a complex phenomenon. Not many people have a clear understanding of it. That is the reason the female gender still faces many social biases and prejudices. Many a times, the gender perspective seems to be missing in various initiatives by the government and political parties meant for empowering women. Conceptually, one must start by emphasizing that women are not made by nature to do or be whatever they are made to be in the society.

Here, it is essential to differentiate between sex and gender. Sex is a biological fact and naturally determined, it signifies the difference between male and female bodies and nothing else. It represents the system of relationships, deeply woven in the set-up of society and everyday life. Since centuries, there has been clear cut division of roles between male and female and different attributes have been associated with them. These roles and attributes are taken for granted and internalized in the psyche of every individual in the society in such a way that these appear to be the arrangement of the nature itself. In the process the gender differences which are socially constructed are interpreted to be rooted in biology. That is why certain roles came to be regarded as typically male and certain as typically female.

In other words, 'sex' refers to differences in biology or anatomy of the human body, which is expressed in male/female, and masculine/feminine distinction. For example, men are usually looked as physically stronger, aggressive with typical masculine features, which enable them to do hard work outside the home. Women, on the other hand, are regarded as biologically weaker but intellectually stronger and brighter. Women are also identified by their caring and nurturing roles, and aided by love and compassion. On the other hand, 'gender differences are socially, or even politically, constructed' (Heywood 2003: 247-248). Social scientists and feminists felt the need to overcome this sex/gender binary and recognize both women and men as individuals, both of whom have the right to maintain their own distinct identity. Feminists, therefore, emphasize the need to achieve, as Andrew Heywood puts it, 'genderless personhood' (Heywood 2003: 248).

In order to understand how the mechanism of power in relation to women operates in the society, it is essential to emphasize on the role of various agencies involved in the process of production and reproduction of patriarchal values. It is not only the traditional institutions like family, peer group and religion which inculcate the socially appropriate values in the woman subject, but even the modern agencies like education and media helps in reproducing such values. So it is important to scrutinize how these institutions represent women's world view and thereby getting an insight into the ways for resisting the dominant ideological patterns.

In such a scenario there is need to investigate what has become a common sense about women's issues, especially as the discussion around women's empowerment and inclusion is mainstreamed in specific ways, in a context of increasing social and economic

inequalities. Studies related to gender issues in social sciences are able to resist the popular conceptions of reality, more specifically, the aura of essentialism. If social sciences were not to conduct such exercises, fixity in form and presentation would have characterized all social phenomenon rendering them unworkable as scientific variables. Further, essentialism allows biases of all sorts to thrive unchecked. This also forces the scholar to be dispassionate and critical and focus on the changing reality of women related to the increased awareness about the women's rights, nature of their oppression and understanding of the basic structural problems. This awareness has led to various forms of resistance whether operating at the individual level or at the group level. An essential definition of women limits woman to the narrow confines of her domestic role and her sexual appeal to men. Through the process of definition of femininity, the institutionalization of traditional division of power between men and women takes place. Femininity represents the universal woman subject. This universal subject is an ideal construct representing the womanhood to which each individual woman must conform. Passiveness and powerlessness is her basic character. The process of standardization works along with the process of mystification in constructing the concept of femininity and essential womanhood.

Here the need is to understand and minimize the adverse impact of power relations as determined by the patriarchal nature of society. Patriarchy represents power relations in which women are kept subordinate in a number of ways involving discrimination, disregard, insult, control and exploitation, violence within the family, at the place of work and in the society as a whole. The power underlying gender relations is so entrenched that it becomes a barrier in the process of their growth. The norms of patriarchy are so internalized that all thinking gets biased. The defining features of patriarchy are male hegemony and male privileges on the one hand and inferior position and powerlessness of women on the other hand. Based on the concept of patriarchy, social structure, cultural norms and value system influence social expectation regarding the behavior of both men and women and determine women's role and position in a society to a large extent. Patriarchy operates both in manifest and latent forms. At the same time, the gendered institutions, gendered processes help reinforce patriarchal mechanism of power. Patriarchy operating through gendered structures positions men and women in superior and inferior positions and grants different values and meanings to them. Gendered institutions indicate

the presence of gender in the processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distribution of power in various sectors of social life. The law, politics, religion and the state all show predominance of the role of men and reveal almost an ineffective role of women. Similarly gendered processes include construction of images, symbols and ideologies which not only reinforce gender divisions, but also legitimize power/powerlessness in the society. The complexity involving the question of powerlessness of women needs to be confronted. The subtle operation of patriarchal relations which legitimizes systematic and widespread subordination of women needs to be properly analyzed. The public-private distinction has also shaped the different ways in which men and women subjects have been defined. The distinctions are also evident in the ways in which men and women have differential access to societal resources through social policies. Women's concerns which emerge out of their direct responsibilities for household management and childcare are deemed to be private rather than public concerns and this marginalizes a range of women's interests from core political discourses. Women are conceptualized in the private sphere of the family as opposed to the construction of individuality. Although all citizens may have the right to participate, women's private responsibilities and social stereotyping of women's public roles which arise from these make it difficult for women to participate as equals in the public sphere. Ideological assumptions about appropriate women's roles have a direct impact on their public capabilities. Women's identity as an individual is downplayed because it is seen as insignificant. As a consequence, gender concerns beyond formal equality are marginalized.

In social sciences if we take up the gender issues for research, it is very important to focus how the gender relations are perceived and the way women are conceptualized by political decision makers and policy makers and planners, as it has a lasting impact on their overall status. Here it is important to analyze government's policies and programmes to enhance the status of women. Here, the attempt is made to analyze the Modi government's flagship policy to improve the status of women in the form of 'Beti Bachao' and 'Beti Padhao' campaign. This campaign addressed two basic issues - underlying discrimination of women that of skewed sex ratio due to female foeticide on the one hand and female literacy on the other. It aims at targeting the societal prejudices against girl child who are given lesser value and preference as compared to male children. The aim of such campaigns and programme is to generate awareness in the society to overcome the

entrenched inequality by providing more opportunities for them to ensure their right to born and right to education. In the absence of appropriate gender perspective, it is doubtful that the campaign would lead to reducing the prejudices against girl child (Chowdhary, 2015). The societal mindset which is often blamed for many of gender related problems is filled with ideological biases that strongly reinforce the gender biases. There is a whole ideological structure that is at work in producing and reproducing biases against women and perpetuating the gender discrimination. In this campaign not only the women's right to be a person in her own right is denied but difference between men and women has been maintained. The basic assumption of patriarchal social relations is taken for granted and in the process women get devalued. Seeing women equal requires that women need to be seen as a person. They are not defined as persons with their identity located in themselves. Usually, women are seen without any individual identity. She is nothing more than a daughter, wife or mother.

To give birth is mother's prerogative as it is she who has to bear the child ultimately. This is a biological fact. But being a mother, it becomes her duty to perform all the parental roles like- taking care of children, schooling, disciplining, teaching them basic civic sense, moulding their personalities etc., all these become the exclusive responsibility of women those emanating from her biological role of reproduction as mother. In fact, these roles are the creation of the society and have nothing to do with the inherent capability of women. It is estimated that nature creates differences between men and women and as nature makes women a mother so it is her duty to perform all roles relating to the upbringing of the child. Often it is argued that since women alone can give birth to a child, so she only can look after the child in a better way. She can understand his/her problems much better. Men can co-operate but can't take her place. But we have numerous examples where children lost their mother at their very birth and have been brought up by their fathers with tender care and love. This clearly proves that apart from giving birth and feeding the child in early months, all other activities related to the child care and bringing it up are parental activities and hence gender neutral. A child is better taken care of if both the parents share his/her childhood and give them an essential protective layer of security and care. Women are recognized through their relation with men and her existence always revolves around the existence of men, be it the father, husband or a son. This does not happen with men as they are seen as persons who enjoy their rights because they are born

as human beings but the women does not have the privilege of being defined similarly. The men also do the same roles as sons, husbands and fathers but their roles are not referred to as in the case of women. It is justified that it is a privilege given to women and they are respected when they are referred as daughters, sisters and mothers etc. No doubt, women should be given respect but reducing them to these roles takes away their right as a person, her aspirations, her individual concept of happiness. This can be understood by highlighting another part of the campaign in which the focus is on educating daughter. Girl's education is preferred because there is a stereotype logic that if you educate a man, you educate a person, but if you educate a woman, you invest in educating a generation. Girl's education is eulogized because she has to take care of the family and if she is properly educated, she can perform her duty in an efficient manner. Here the question arises why the men do not share the responsibility of rearing, training and socializing children along with women. Right from the very beginning, we find the negligence of gender dimension in national plans and policies. In the absence of clear-cut gender perspective, the direction of development had either left the women untouched or had affected them adversely. Sex segregated environment is taken for granted; hence, the programmes and policies don't disturb the existing structural patterns in relation to gender. Another part of 'Beti Bachao' campaign addresses the question of skewed sex ratio leading to the acute imbalance and poses numerous problems for the society. As marriageable bachelors are not finding the girls of their age, there had been increasing incidences of violence against women. Here also the target is to prevent female foeticide, as it is a crime to murder an unborn child and she has every right to born. The focus is on correcting the societal imbalance. The logic of saving the girl child is not linked with the person of women as such.

Another example where we find how the political parties appropriate gender issues to be in power especially during National and Assembly elections but gender perspective which is required for real empowerment and emancipation seems to be missing in their approach. In the contemporary context, the issues like women's security, rising violence against women have become major electoral issues in national and assembly elections. This must be the reason and worth appreciating also that campaigns during these elections have been more or less gender-centric in their approach. It has become clear to all political parties aspiring to be in power that the backing of women voters can tilt the scale in their

favour. They could not afford to ignore the emerging constituency of women. During the Delhi's Assembly Elections in 2015, electoral campaigns and manifestoes of main contesting political parties like BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) took up the issues of gender and sexuality. Both the parties claimed to provide safe environment for women in the city (better known as capital of rape), perpetually threatened by the rising cases of crimes against women, and especially rape cases. AAP in its 70 point manifesto emphasized adequate institutional arrangement (proper street lighting, installing CCTV cameras, setting up fast track courts, special women security forces etc., as women's safety initiatives) to provide safe environment for women. Similarly, BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate Kiran Bedi, a retired police officer, talked about disciplining and policing the environment. Her 25-point blue-print promised community policing, increased patrolling, CCTVs, home guards, civil defense escorts on buses and ladies' special buses. Though, both the parties felt the necessity to address the question of gender in the campaign, yet they were more interested in giving big brother status to the state so that it can give protection to its women folk. In order to win the election, political parties raise the issues focusing women's immediate interests and fail to understand that gender equality is systematically structured. Although Political parties express their commitment to gender equality but their commitment is never reflected in their actions, if we look at their leadership structure, nominations of the candidates and campaign financing etc.

. Over the years, feminists' discourse is focusing in detail the continuing nature of exclusion which characterizes the women, countering male perspective on gender relations, developing the knowledge of women about issues concerning them and consientizing the society about women's problems etc. There is a need for interrogating the disciplines form the feminist perspective. Rigid conceptualization has to be challenged. e.g, the discipline of economics that forms the basis of economic policies of the country which eluded the marginalized section of the society including women. Unpaid work and care which is done mostly by women is not counted in GDP calculations. The poverty of economics lies in its inability to factor in the different structural positions that men and women occupy in any economy, which lead to differential outcomes for men and women even if the policies are the same. Feminist economists have demonstrated how theories and the policies on economics have been able to maintain that economic outcome are gender neutral, which

are not. There is a need to address the gender issues in social sciences with a perspective so that the feminist agenda of social transformation can be realized

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