

## Gender Inequality

### What is meant by gender role?

#### Gender

Gender refers to the cultural, socially constructed difference between males and females. It refers to the way a society encourages and teaches the two sexes to behave in different ways through socialization.

A **gender role** is the pattern of behaviour and activities which any society expects from both sexes. According to Talcott Parsons, men have an '**instrumental role**' as the bread winner whereas women have an '**expressive role**' as the care giver of the family.

### What is a gender stereotype?

A gender stereotype is a generalized view of the typical or ideal characteristic of men and women. In a typical social set up, women are expected to show the feminine characteristics of being pretty, gentle, caring and submissive focusing on maintaining family ties and doing domestic roles. The masculine stereotype, on the other hand emphasizes characteristics such as physical strength, aggression, independence and ambition focusing on performing the tasks like playing sports, achieving success at work and being the decision makers.



Stereotypical image of a female



Stereotypical image of a male

### Breaking the stereotypes/ the changing status of women

- Today, women have equal right to men in many areas due to a number of reasons
- Women have achieved more political rights, the right to vote, to participate in politics etc
- Women today have equal rights with men in education.
- More types of jobs are seen as suitable for women, which has given them more financial independence.
- Women have won equal rights with men in property ownership.
- The 1923 Matrimonial Act has given equal rights to women in terms of divorce.

### How did the women of the west fight with the system?

## **Reasons of change in the status of women**

### **The Suffragette Movement**

The Suffragette movement which started at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aimed to achieve voting rights for women equal to the rights of men in parliamentary elections. This involved a long and violent struggle against male mindset of not allowing females to have a role in politics. The success of this campaign gave women political power in elections for the first time. Therefore, the political candidates were compelled to take women interests in consideration if they wanted to be elected.

### **Two world wars**

During the two world wars, women took over many jobs in the factories and farms which were formerly done by men, since the men went off to fight as soldiers. Women showed during these war years that they were quite capable of doing the job only men were supposed to do. This began to change people's ideas about a woman's role.

### **The Women's Movement**

The women's movement first emerged in the 1960s and was concerned with the fight to achieve with men in the wide range of areas. This movement was not a single group but consisted of many women groups with various aims. These groups were united by the need to improve the status and rights of women, and to end patriarchy.

**{PATRIARCHY means male dominance/a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.}**

The women's movement challenged many ideas about the traditional role of women particularly the stereotype that 'a woman's place is in the home'.

This movement campaigned for

- Better nursery facilities
- Equal pay and job opportunities
- The removal of tax and financial discrimination against women
- Freedom from violence against women

### **Smaller family size**

The declining size of the family has also reduced the time spent in child rearing and taking care of the family. This has given greater opportunities to enter paid employment. A typical mother of the modern age spends four years in child rearing and she lives much longer than the women of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore she can pursue her career much earlier and can take it up consistently with fewer or no children to look after.

### **Technology at home**

Advances in technology have brought many improvements in life style. Devices and machines like freezers, food processors, vacuum cleaners and washing machines have made life easier for women , thus giving them extra time for socialization and career pursuits.

### **Problems for women at home and workplace**

**Domestic labour: unpaid work**

Housework has never been considered a job worth monetary reward, although it is important to remember that it is one job that is performed full time almost exclusively by women. This domestic labour of women is hardly recognized as 'real work' and carries little status compared to paid employment. Many women who are housewives themselves often devalue the status of their job by phrases like 'I'm only a housewife'. Ann Oakley found that an average 77 hours are spent on housework and related tasks, a greater amount of time than most people spend on paid job. Yet domestic labour has none of the benefits of paid employment like chances of promotion, holiday pay or sick pay.

**Gendered division of work**

This simply means that jobs are divided into men's jobs and women's jobs, with women's jobs often having lower pay, poor promotion prospects, and lower status than men. Fewer women are employed in top managerial and professional groups. Although many women have excelled in job market but majority of them still faces discrimination.

**Glass ceiling effect**

The glass ceiling is a phrase referring to an artificial barrier that prevents women and minorities from being promoted to managerial- and executive-level positions within an organization. The phrase glass ceiling is used to describe the difficulties faced by women when trying to move to higher roles in a male-dominated hierarchy. The barriers are most often unwritten, meaning that women are more likely to be restricted from advancing through accepted norms and biases, rather than defined corporate policies.

**Workplace harassment**

Workplace harassment is the most disturbing of all pressures women face in any society. It can be any intimidating or offensive attitude that can harm a woman physically or emotionally. Although few women take legal action against the harassers, majority of them opt for keeping silent or switching the job. These acts can lead to lower self esteem, depression or emotional breakdowns among the victims.

Furthermore the following problems are also continually experienced by women of the modern world

- Limited career opportunities
- Lower pay
- Limited access to training

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