



GENDER ISSUES IN GEOGRAPHY

Dr. Ranjan Sharma

Associate Professor

Department of Geography

Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Degree College

Gonda – 271001 (U.P.)

ABSTRACT

The construction processes of societies are based upon cultural values and norms about men, women, gender relations, femininity, and masculinity. Gender has different meanings. The social, cultural, behavioral, and emotional distinctions between men and women are referred to as gender. The two gender groups identified are masculine and feminine. The use of geographical spaces from individual to global level is affected by gender. All spaces, as home, neighborhood, public places, labour market or global market are closely and inseparably characterized by specific activities of men and women. Here, the specific gendered power relations and specific symbolic meanings of gender are also relevant. Hence, acknowledging gender as an essential basis of analysis is required in geographical researches. Although geography as a science, traditionally focusses on specific socio-spatial contexts, it has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the rapidly developing and inherently interdisciplinary field of gender studies. Gender has an impact on how people see themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and how power and resources are distributed in society. The study of gender within geography has introduced new theoretical concepts, as, gendering of public and private spaces, gendered division of paid and unpaid labour and challenges to the gender assumptions. Gender analyses within geography have examined the ways in which gender roles and relations manifest spatially. Gender research examines the ways in which gender inequality has emerged. Gender geography focusses on the oppression of women, as evidenced in the differences seen in the attitudes and behaviors of men and women in the traditional settings of home, work place, and social situations. Gendering of spaces and the study of gender has been an instrumental part of the cultural turn in geography. Gender division of labour and space, gender-politics, gender and migration or mobility, gender and environment, are issues studied in gender geography. Gender geography has its roots in the compelling women's



rights movement of the 1960s and the emergence of feminist theory in the social science disciplines.

Key words: Gender, Masculine, Feminine, Spatial, Feminist, Migration.

Geography as a subject is multidisciplinary in nature which ties up with various aspects of socio-cultural, economic and political disciplines. Studying gender in geography is related with the socio-cultural aspects of gendered relations which needs to be explained in the context of locality research. Gender has different meanings. (Harding, 1986). *Gender is a pivot of social order*, i.e, it is central to social functioning. Despite numerous change in societies, there exists a specific division of work between men and women. Gender is supposed to be an essential *element of individual identity* Socialization of boys and girls takes place differently in families and thus male and female identity is developed. Gender is considered to be an important *dimension in the symbolic system*. How male and female persons are expected to behave are communicated by means of cultural values and norms which indicate masculinity and femininity. This shapes the personal identity and social institutions. These structural, individual and symbolic meanings of gender are responsible in shaping the constitutions and the use of spaces and places from local to global level (Mc. Dowell,1999). All spaces and places are characterized by specific activities of men and women, and thus specifying gendered power relations and specific symbolic meanings of gender. Geographic researches should, therefore, acknowledge gender as one of the essential bases of analysis and systematically study gender issues. Gender and sex are in contrast to each other. While sex is based on biological differences of being male or female, gender describes the socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Geographers are interested in the diversity of gender relations in different localities as well as the specifications of gender within macro processes of globalization or economic restrictions. Gender geography explores various aspects of gender relationships, as the attitudes of men and women, the economic, social and political status of women, in particular. Thus, study of gender in geography is centered around the broader social, economic and political processes and the ways in which spatial concepts are seriously gendered in depth. In this context, it is also a matter of concern to pay attention to both, men and women, as they experience different spaces and also how different spaces and places are represented.

Gender geography does not adopt a narrow-minded approach to study gender in terms of oppression of women, rather it rests on a critical approach in questioning the dimensions of age, class, ethnicity, orientation and many other socio-economic factors. Gender geography is concerned with the oppression of women and inequalities that are found in their treatment in the economic and political sectors. The approach of gender geography, is



however, not limited to the geographies of women, but it strives to bring about changes within the discipline of geography itself and bring them into line with gender findings. The geography of women displays how spatial constraint and separation enter into the construction of women's position. It seeks to explain inequality and the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. The main emphasis lies in how to reduce gender inequality based on patriarchy and capitalism. The geographical focus is on spatial separation, gender place and localities. The gender relations that differ from place to place not only reflect, but also determine partly the local economic changes. It has been observed that whenever women's rights are diminished by means of performance based measures in geographical spaces, the conventions around this context make it seem as the norm. Thus, it is interesting to understand about how gender relations and identities are shaped and assumed. This has led to rethink about the base of gender category and the contradictions and possibilities presented by the seeming instability and insistent repetitions of gender norms in practice.

Gender explains the differences between men and women in social terms as, what a man can do, and what a woman can or cannot do. Therefore, gender is socially constructed to differentiate the biological difference between men and women. Such differences are not biological but are social constructions of the patriarchal society. Some theorists suggest that biologically men are physically and mentally superior to women. Other theorists find these biological differences to be exaggerated and view them as a social construction by the patriarchal society. Women's productive or labour power, their reproductive power, their sexuality, their mobility, property and other economic resources are said to be controlled by men in a patriarchal society. Men control women's productivity both, within the household, and outside in paid work. Women are compelled to sell their labour outside and their household work is not considered to be their labour. In many societies, women have no control over their reproductive capacities and they are controlled to take decisions in this direction by men. Women's mobility and freedom of movement is restricted, while men are free to move. Most of the property related and productive resources are controlled by men. Even where women have legal rights to inherit property, the customary practices, social sanctions and emotional pressures, prevent them from acquiring control over them. Some other critical areas of concern showing the subordination of women to men are – women suffer poverty, lack educational opportunities, have less access to health and related services, suffer violence, face unequal sharing of power and decision making at all levels, lack an awareness towards their rights, face discrimination in survival and protection of the girl child. This shows the gender inequalities prevailing in our societies. Developing countries show gender imbalance in education by favoring boys. In labour markets, gender segregation is being observed which places women in low status jobs with low pay and



insecure job conditions. Women are found to be high in proportion amongst the poor. Women account for only 16% of representation in national assemblies and their effective participation is limited by established male hierarchies. Women are more likely to experience ill-health than men. and gender violence exist to be a significant cause behind such experience. Differential access to health-care and nutrition lead to untimely death of many women.

The period of 1980s witnessed some significant changes in the capitalist economic system. These changes were instrumental in changing the traditional relationships that existed between men and women. The workplace began to absorb more women and they sought and gained political office in high number. Women in middle-management positions began to strive for higher positions in their organizations. Prior to changes seen in 1980s, women's roles were clearly identified in home and neighborhood or suburb while the work world predominantly found in urban places was the domain of men. Thus, women were marginalized with limited access to opportunities outside the home. Gender geographers focused on such issues, brought them to light and advocated for change.

World Scenario of Gender Issues

The 1990s brought forward a number of significant studies on the status of women in the world. Some of the most significant outcomes of these studies reveal the shocking social and economic conditions experienced by women in the developing regions of the world. Such studies provide much evidence to support the gender geographers who claimed the oppression of women and the clear dominance of male bias. Higher rate of illiteracy among women and practice of female infanticide in developing countries, are examples of male bias. Many regions of the world have strong bias towards male offspring and this leads to female infanticide. China and India, especially favour such ideas and practices. In 1979, when China instituted a national policy of having one child only in families, female infanticide increased dramatically, till the government relaxed this rigid policy. In 1994, The United Nations International Conference On Population Development, in Cairo, drew attention to the unfortunate situation of women around the world. Policies were instituted that aimed at giving more control to women over their own lives. Attention was paid towards the achievement of economic quality and opportunity, a great voice in reproductive decisions, and increased access to education. These policies marked a departure from previous declarations, which were limited to the implementation of population control measures. In September 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. A strong declaration of women's rights and equality marked this event. Gender issues addressed were, sexuality and child-bearing, violence against women, discrimination against women in different areas of social life, and the assurance of women's equal access to



opportunities in the economic system. Specifically, access were sought to land ownership, availability of financial credit, vocational training, information and communication.

Gender differences are found to be greatest in the developing world. Estimated earned income strongly favours males. In developed countries, some cases report of having earned income double that of women. With few exceptions in the developing countries, adult male literacy rates are significantly higher than that of women. Throughout the world, women on an average have higher life expectancy than men. The United Nations set of Human Development Indicators (2003) contains two compilations, directly applicable to gender geography. These are, GDI (Gender related Development Index) and GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) GDI is a composite index measuring achievement in three basic dimensions - a long and happy life, knowledge and standard of living. Data obtained on life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate and estimated earned income, provide knowledge about these dimensions. The GEM measures gender inequality, using three basic dimension of empowerment: economic participation and decision making, political participation and decision making and power over economic resources. In all these three dimensions, throughout the world, women significantly lag behind men. Gender empowerment is determined by the degree to which women and men participate actively in economic, political, professional activity and take part in decision making. Women's empowerment begins with, being conscious about their perceptions, rights and capacities, awareness about their gender and social, cultural, economic and political pressures that affect them. Women empowerment is based on three dimensions-reproductive health and family planning, violence against women and socio- economic empowerment. Today gender inequality is recognised as being the most pervasive inequality Worldwide. There is no country in the world where women enjoy the same status as men, in different walks of life.

Worldwide data available on the status of women, suggests that different places show different scenario Category of seats in government held by women (as percent of total), the highest figure is 45.3% in Sweden. The remainder of the developed countries report percentages, ranging from 10 to the mid-30s. Percentages in the developing countries in this category are much lower. The percentage of women having professional and technical positions (as percent of total) are more equitable. Some countries- Iceland, United States, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand and Israel, have more women than men in this category. Some developing countries also show data in this direction, as, Namibia, Moldova, Honduras and Botswana. The category of earned income is decidedly in favor of men. Australia, Finland and Latvia have the highest ratios of female to male earned income (0.70). All other countries in the world are below that figure with some as low as 0.30. Thus, earned income in a category worldwide that strongly favors men. Women occupying the positions of manager and administrator are at the highest percentage in North America, Australia,



New Zealand, South Africa and several European countries. The lowest percentages are in the middle East, over half of the African countries and the Indian subcontinent. Thus, women remain a distinct minority in the exercise of economic power and decision making. It seems a long journey to attain gender equality worldwide.

In India, gender issues are common in both rural and urban areas. The most prominent area seen is related with workforce participation rates and wage rates. It has been observed that women from lower strata of society, face economic exploitation as well as social oppression as compared to their male counterparts. Dr. Amantya sen studied gender inequalities in 28 states of India in terms of well-being and wealth indices, based on National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06) data. Overall, women were found to be far behind men in terms of well-being. Aged women living in a large family showed a decline in well-being as compared to men. Women residing in northern mountainous regions were found to be doing better than women in the Indo Gangetic plains. However, the well being of both men and women was found to be significantly related to the wealth they possessed. Discrimination against the girl child in India is an existing reality which reflects serious gender based differences, inequalities and neglect. Girl child faces deprivation in different areas of life due to a complex interplay of culture and socio-economic factors. Within many communities in India, women especially are found to be deprived in different walks of life. In this context, women emerged as worthy to be studied on the geographical horizon of India. In our constitution, Article 14 ensures equality before the law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 16 is concerned with the equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 39 seeks equal pay for equal work and Article 42 seeks to ensure humane work conditions and provide for maternity relief. All this gives an impression that equality and protection from gender discrimination has been well constituted in India. The Government of India appointed a National Committee on the status of women in 1971. This aimed to evaluate the changes that had taken place in the status of women as a result of constitutional, legal administrative measures adopted since Independence. In spite of these laws, gender discrimination is frequently seen all over the country. In India, child sex ratios have increased rapidly to 107 boys for every 100 girls (Gailmoto and as Depledge, 2008) Sex ratios vary substantially by region, in India, thus showing 120 boys over 100 girls in some states. Across India 75% of women over 21 years of age have migrated, while only 15% men live at some other place leaving their birth town. 90% of female migration occurs due to marriage. Thus, gender imbalance for children and gendered migration interact, creating complex spatial and gender dynamics. Gender imbalance among children are largely determined by the pre- and post-natal decisions of parents (Arokiasamy, 2007), who live in a particular place and have preferences for sons and access to sex-selection technology and medical care that are determined locally. The effects



of vast sexual imbalances in India differ by geographic areas. Moreover, marriage migration may enhance gender biases and gender imbalance in the next generation. The large majority of women move to join their husband's family, potentially reinforcing the values of sons and increasing the incentives to spend scarce resources on sons' health and education over daughters' (Jayachandran and Kuziemko, 2011; Oster, 2009, a, b). The falling female to male ratio in India and other countries in Asia has prompted some efforts to show down the trend including banning sex-selective abortions (Arnold, Kishor and Roy, 2002) and offering monetary incentives to have girls (Anukriti, 2013). But these efforts have proved largely ineffective. Skewed sex ratios are often worst in elite groups which have a role in gender imbalance (Patel, et. al., 2013) Thus, gender issues in India needs a careful attention in family and society and such issues need to be studied in spatial contexts.

CONCLUSION

Gender issues are now becoming critical day by day. Women do not feel comfortable and safe in today world. Though different measures are available to resolve gender issues but results in this direction are not much promising. Gender related disparities should be studied in spatial context and geography has much to do in this direction. So, gender issues are becoming more and more important in different regions of the world. Geographical research on women has yet to develop a cohesive feminist perspective and abiding interest among geographers worldwide. Recent geographical studies are dealing with gender issues with emphasis on identifying the regional patterns of literacy, work participation, fertility and sex-ratio. Researches in these areas must correlate the parameters with levels of socio-economic development in larger regional or national framework. Gender research has had a significant impact on several sub-disciplines within geography. Much of this research needs to be focused on gender divisions of labour and space, gender politics, gendered forms of security and insecurity, gender and migration or mobility, and the gender and environment. These gender issues in geography calls for embodied and place-based research, while attending to the linkages between conceptions of place, space and scale and the connections between intimate or everyday and global processes. Thus geography with its long tradition of analyzing different cultural and structural contexts at local, regional, national or international level, can make important contributions to gender researches.

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