

Q: Write a comprehensive note on the
Social construction of Gender.

Social construction of Gender:-

Gender is used as a means of describing the distinction between the biological sex and socialized aspects of masculinity and femininity. According to West and Zimmerman, it is not a personal trait, it is an emergent feature of social situations, both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements, and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society. According to Kessler and McKenna, a world of two "sexes" is a result of the socially shared, taken-for-granted methods that members use to construct reality. Social construction of gender determines attitudes about what men and women are capable of, how they should behave, what kind of role models and images are presented for men and women, and who will occupy positions of power. All social construction approaches adopt the view that physically identical gender and sex may have varying social significance and subjective meaning, depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods. The social construction of gender applies to various values, norms and beliefs that are created by the dominant economic and most powerful groups. These values, norms and beliefs are perpetuated and reinforced by social institutions like the workplace, the media, education, religion and others. These values, norms and beliefs dictate access to upward mobility as well as shaping

identity, personality and gender roles. From birth on, infants of both sexes are conditioned by parental and other and other adult responses to behave, think and interact in gender-specific role manifestations.

Society and culture create gender roles and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific gender. Stronger versions argue that the differences in behavior between men and women are entirely social conventions, whereas weaker versions believe that behavior is defined by biological universal factors to some extent, but the social conventions also have some effect on gendered behavior.

Judith Butler's point of View

Judith Butler is one of the most prominent social theorists currently working on issues related to the social construction of gender. According to her the repetitive performances of "male" and "female" in accordance with social norms reifies the categories, creating the appearance of a neutralized and essential binary. Gender is never a stable descriptor of individual, but an individual is always "doing" gender, performing or deviating from the socially constructed accepted performance of gender stereotypes. Doing gender is not about acting in particular way. It is about embodying and believing certain

gender norms and engaging in practices that map on to these norms. By doing gender, we reinforce the notion that there are only two mutually exclusive categories of gender. The internalized belief that men and women are essentially different is what makes men and women behave in ways that appear essentially different. Gender is maintained as a category through socially constructed displays of gender. Gender is internalized and acquires significance for the individual: some individuals want to feel feminine or masculine. Social construction might argue that because categories are ^{only} formed within a social context even the effect of gender is in some ways a social relation. Social construction would say that gender is interactional rather than individual - it is developed through social interactions. Gender is also said to be omnirelevant; meaning that people are always judging our behavior either to be male or female. Gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction, out of social life and the texture and order of the social life. Yet gender, like culture is a human production that depends on everyone constantly "doing gender".

For the individual, gender construction starts with assignment to a sex category on the

basis of what the genitala looks like at the time of birth. Then babies are dressed and adorned in a way that displays category because parents don't want to be continually asked about the gender of their baby. A sex category becomes a gender status through naming, dressing and use of other gender markers. Once a child's gender is evident others treat those in one gender, differently from those in the other, and the children respond to the different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently. As soon as they talk they start to refer themselves as their gender. Sex does not come into play again until puberty, but by that time, sexual feelings and desires and practices have been shaped by gender norms and expectations. Parenting is gendered with different expectations from for mothers and for fathers and people of different genders work at different kind of jobs. The work adults do as mothers do as mothers and fathers and as a low level workers and high level bosses, shapes men's and women's life experiences and these experiences produce different feelings, consciousness, relationships skill ways of being that we call feminine and masculine. All these processes constitute the social construction of gender.

Gendering is done from birth, constantly

and by every, not only because individuals experience gender but at gender as a social institution. As a social institution gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives. Human society depends upon predictable divisions of labour, a designated division of scarce goods, assigned responsibility of children and others who cannot care for themselves, common values and their systematic transmission to new members, legitimate leadership, music, art, stories, games and other symbolic productions. One way of choosing people for the different tasks of society is on the basis of their talents, motivations, competence and their demonstrated achievements. The other way is on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity - ascribed membership in a category of people. Every society uses gender and age grades. Every society classifies people as "girl and boy" children, "girls and boys ready to be married" and "fully adult women and men" construct similarities and differences among them, and assign them to different roles and responsibilities. Personality, characteristics, feelings, motivations and ambitions flow from these different kinds of people. The process of gendering and its outcome

are legitimated by religion, laws, science and the society's entire set of values. Western society's values legitimate gendering by claiming that it all comes from Physiology - female and male procreative differences. But gender and sex are not equivalent and gender as a social construction does not flow automatically from genitalia and reproductive organs - the main physiological differences of females and males. In construction of ascribed social statuses, physiological differences, such as sex, stage of development, color of skin and size are crude marks. They are not the source of social statuses of gender, age grade and race. Social statuses are carefully constructed through prescribed processes of teaching, learning, emulation, and enforcement.

Key aspects of social construction of gender

a) Cultural and historical variability :-

Cultural and historical variability in the social construction of gender is a rich and complex phenomenon that underscores the dynamic nature of gender roles, norms, and identities across different societies and time periods. What is considered appropriate behavior for men

and women in one society may differ drastically from another period or society. For example, attitudes towards gender expression, work roles, and family dynamics have evolved significantly throughout history.

b) Socialization process:-

From a young age individuals are socialized into understanding and performing according to the norms of their society. The socialization occurs through various institutions, such as family, education, media and religion. Children learn what behaviors, interests and occupations are associated with being male or female, through observation, reinforcement and imitation.

c) Intersectionality:-

The social construction of gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, class, sexuality and ability. Intersectionality - theory developed by Kimberle Crenshaw, emphasizes that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression and privilege simultaneously, and these intersecting identities shape their experience of gender. For example, the experience of a white heterosexual woman may differ significantly from

- those of a queer woman of color due to
the intersecting effects of race, sexual orientation
and gender
