

Q. NO2. Masculinity and femininity are the deeply engraved realities since distant past in human history. Discuss various theoretical debates on the construction of masculinity and femininity to make it explicit that the formation of both is neither natural or social reality. Support your arguments with real life examples.

Answer.

## 1. Introduction

Human societies across history have classified gender into categories of masculinity and femininity. Traditionally, men have been associated with traits such as strength, rationality, ambition, and authority, while women have been seen as delicate, emotional, nurturing, and dependent. However, feminist thinkers and sociologists argue that such distinctions are neither purely biological nor purely constructed. Instead, masculinity and femininity emerge as historical constructions, reproduced through culture, psychology, and institutions. These categories serve not only as descriptive traits but as normative ideals - prescribing how men and women should behave, dress, speak, and live. Their persistence across centuries make them appear "natural", yet closer examination reveal that they are socially sustained roles that change across time and culture.

## 2. Overview of Masculinity and Femininity

### Masculinity

Assertive, dominant,  
decision making

Independent and  
goal oriented

Public authority and  
leadership

Competitive and  
materialistic

Focus on wealth,  
ambition, and  
success

### Femininity

Submissive, delicacy,  
emotionality

Dependent and  
supportative

Domestic roles, caregiving,  
motherhood

Sensitive, empathetic,  
talkative

Focus on nurturing,  
modesty, relationships

## 3. Masculinity and Femininity as Deeply Engraved Realities in History

Masculinity and femininity are not new concepts; they have been deeply engraved realities since ancient civilizations. In Ancient Greece, political participation and citizenship were considered exclusively masculine domains, while women were confined to household management and private life,

which is very well explained by structural functionalist. During medieval times, masculinity became synonymous with knighthood, bravery, and authority, whereas femininity was closely linked to piety, obedience, and motherhood. Even in contemporary societies, masculine traits are coded into professions like engineering, politics, and the military, while feminine traits are associated with teaching, nursing, and domestic care giving. For instance, the simple association of blue with boys and pink with girls highlights how gender differences are reinforced even through symbolic colour codes. Thus, these realities, though appearing natural, are deeply rooted in historical practices and perpetuated across generations.

## 4. Origin of Masculinity and Femininity

### 4.1 Structural - Functionalist Perspective and the origin of masculinity and femininity

From structural functionalist's viewpoint, masculinity and femininity originated as functional division of labour in early societies. Men's physical strength made them suitable for hunting, warfare, and providing protection, while women's reproductive roles placed them in child-bearing and domestic roles. This complementary division was seen as necessary for social stability. However, over time these functional roles became

rigid norms, lines forming practical divisions into gender stereotypes.

## 4.2 Conflict Perspective: The origin of masculinity and femininity.

The conflict perspective, rooted in Marxist and feminist thought, interprets the origins of masculinity and femininity as a result of power struggles. Masculinity evolved as a lot of dominance, granting men authority over resources, decision-making, and social institutions, while femininity was constructed to justify women's subordination. Gender distinctions, therefore, are not functional but exploitative, serving to maintain patriarchal control.

## 5. Theoretical Perspectives on Masculinity and Femininity

### 5.1 Psycho-Analytic Theory:

This theory argues that masculinity and femininity stem from deep rooted psychological pattern. Men have inherent psychological need to subjugate women, while women are conditioned into subordination. This domination-subjugation binary begins in early childhood through parental expectations, toys, and reinforcement. For instance, Boys are told "don't cry like a girl," shaping toughness as masculine and

vulnerability as feminine.

## 5.2 The Gender Schema Theory

According to Sandra Bem, children internalize cultural norms about gender by forming schemas - mental framework of what it means to be a male or female. Society reinforces these schemas through toys, clothing, school practices, and media representation. For example, in advertising, campaigns, men are shown as breadwinners driving cars or making financial decisions, while women are shown using beauty products or taking care of families, reflecting and reproducing gender schemas.

## 5.3 Freud's Theory of Masculinity and Femininity

Freud argued that masculinity derives from the possession of male sexual organ, which gives men a perceived superiority. He saw women's lack of it as linked to their subordination. Male has a natural superiority over women because women doesn't have male's organ. However, later interpretations stress that gender identity is culturally shaped rather than biologically fixed. For example, in many South Asian cultures, the birth of a son is celebrated with rituals, while birth of daughter may be met with disappointment - reflecting Freud's notion of

male privilege tied to anatomy and cultural preference.

## 6. Conclusion

Masculinity and femininity are not simply natural traits of men and women but deeply embedded cultural construction shaped by history, psychology, and social structures.

From ancient civilizations to modern societies, gender categories have been framed to privilege masculine attributes over feminine ones, reinforcing patriarchy.

Theoretical perspectives - from psychoanalytic insights into domination, to Ben's schemas of cultural learning, to Freud's anatomy based interpretation - all reveal that these categories are neither purely biological nor purely social, but hybrid realities formed at intersection of body, culture, and psyche. Masculinity and femininity are not universal truth but historical performances that shift across societies and times. Their endurance demonstrates not natural inevitability but the power of culture to engrave social differences onto gender identity.