UNIT 2 : BASIC CONCEPTS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.3 Gender discrimination
2.4 Patriarchy and Matriarchy
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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the meaning of gender discrimination
- understand the meaning of patriarchy
- understand the meaning of gender justice

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Gender is a primary marker of social and economic stratification as a result, of exclusion. Regardless of one's socioeconomic class, there are systematic gender differences in material well-being, although the degree of inequality varies across countries and over time. As a result, gender inequality is a characteristic of most societies, with males on average better positioned in social, economic, and political hierarchies. For more than two decades, gender inequality has held a prominent place in international organizations and in national strategy statements. Gender inequality is not perpetuated exclusively through differential access to and control over material resources. Gender norms and stereotypes reinforce gendered identities and constrain the behaviour of women and men in ways that lead

to inequality (Ridgeway, 2011). In this unit we will discuss some of the basic concepts associated with gender.

2.3 GENDER DISCRIMINATION

In the simplest terms discrimination is the unequal treatment of people on the basis of different characteristics. According to Quillian, factors such as stereotypes, prejudice and/or racism motivate a person to discriminate. Gender discrimination as the name suggests is the unfair treatment meted out to a particular gender. It is often seen women are denied of opportunities due to their gender and they also experience violation of their rights. Women are considered inferior to men both physically and mentally and their lives are totally controlled by men. The birth of a son is considered a blessing and is celebrated while a daughter is considered as a burden. Wife beating is common and is considered a method of keeping women under control. Daughters are married off at an early age to men much older than them. The family honour is associated with women and their actions and movements are monitored so that they do not bring shame to the family. Women are confined to their houses and can only go out when escorted by a male member of the family. In some societies women are also supposed to observe purdah; covering of entire body except eyes when they go out. Women in some part of India are fortunate as they are taken to hospitals for childbirth. Women are generally considered weak not only physically but also mentally. Therefore they are never included in decision making and very often the consent of the girl is not sought when her marriage is arranged. Women are considered naive and their approaches to problems are considered immature and therefore their opinions are disregarded. Positive attributes such as intelligence, smartness and strength are associated with men. Gender discrimination is largely responsible for poverty and backwardness in India. In today's world progress is only possible when men and women work side by side. The people usually claim that girls' education does not bring in returns but it is a wrong notion. Denial of health care facilities has resulted in greater maternal deaths and psychological diseases; it also negatively affects the health of children.

2.4 PATRIARCHY & MATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male members as the primary authority is central. It refers to a system where men have authority over women, children and property. As an institution of male rule and privilege, patriarchy is dependent on female subordination. Historically, it has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic institutions of different cultures. Patriarchy also has had a strong influence on modem civilization, notwithstanding the fact that many cultures have moved towards a more egalitarian social system over the past century (Malti- Douglas). Literally meaning “rule of fathers,” (Ferguson 1048), the term ‘patriarchy’ was initially used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family. However, in modem times, it more generally refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men. (Meagher 441-42) Anthropological and historical evidence indicates that most prehistoric societies were relatively more egalitarian and that patriarchal social structure did not develop until many years after the end of the Pleistocene era, following social and technological innovations such as agriculture and domestication (Kraemer 377-92). However, according to Robert M. Strozier, historical research has not yet found a specific “initiating event” of the origin of patriarchy. Some scholars point to the concept of ‘fatherhood root’ as the beginning of the spread of patriarchy as it came into being six thousand years ago. Domination of women by men dates back to 3100 BCE, as there were restrictions imposed on a woman’s reproductive capacity. There is also the evidence of her exclusion from “the process of representing or the consumption of history.” With the appearance of the Hebrews, there was also “the exclusion of woman from the God-humanity covenant”. (Strozier 46) The Aristotelian philosophy viewed women as morally, intellectually and physically inferior to men. Besides women were seen as property of men by society thereby suggesting that women’s role was to reproduce and serve men in the household.It was believed that male domination of women was natural and virtuous (Fishbein 27). Most forms of feminism characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. As a feminist and

political theorist, Carole Pateman writes, “The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection” (Pateman 207). In feminist theory, however, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analysing its manifestations (Tickner 1197-98). Most sociologists reject predominantly biological explanations of patriarchy and contend that social and cultural conditioning is primarily responsible for establishing male and female gender roles (Sandersom 198). According to standard sociological theory, patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. These constructions are most pronounced in societies with traditional cultures and less economic development. However, gender messages conveyed by family, mass media and other institutions largely favour males having a dominant status. Some socio-biologists, such as Steven Goldberg argue that social behaviour is primarily determined by genetics and that patriarchy comes into being more as a result of inherent biology than social conditioning. He also contends that patriarchy is a universal feature of human culture. In 1973, Goldberg wrote: “The ethnographic studies of every society that has ever been observed explicitly state that these feelings were present and there is literally no variation at all” (Goldberg). Any attempt to define patriarchy explains the reasons for the subordination of women through the ages and its bearing on their future and success in life. Patriarchy not only explains how our society functions but also as to how it controls women. It is best defined as ‘control’ by men.

Since the tribal women have to work in the forests and fields, they have considerable freedom of movement and share economic responsibility equally. They may outwardly seem to accept male superiority but enjoy more freedom compared to their urban counterparts. Matriarchy is concept which is opposite to patriarchy. In this system the authority of the women is central. However existence of such a system is contended. But in India small pockets of matrilineal society can be found. Matrili ny is slightly different

from matriarchy. In matrilineal communities, descent is traced through women, but political power generally rests with men. Land alongside other property is inherited through female lineage; but its management rests with men. The matrilineal system does endow women with special sense of dignity and status; however, male and female spheres of activity and control continue to be separately demarcated. There is a Khasi saying: "War and politics are for men while property and children are for women" (Dube 109). Among them, the rulers, the chiefs, and power-wielding "elders" are all male, but women have important economic roles to perform. Khasi women, for example, run small shops and engage in local trade. The Nayar women, who form part of the Hindu society of Kerala landlords or non-cultivating tenants, were home-bound whereas their men took up military service. In their Tarawad (matrilineal joint household among Nayars of Kerala), property was owned and inherited by women, but it was looked after by the Kctrnovor (the manager) who would always be a male. This practice is much the same among the matrilineal Muslim families of Lakshadweep Islands. Only in some matrilineal societies in Kerala and Karnataka women were entitled to headship of the family. Matrilineal system is also in the verge of extinction as contemporary social practices have been effecting certain changes in its functioning. The market economy, modem education, increased geographical mobility and new employment opportunities are some of the major factors for change. In units comprising husband, wife and children especially located in alien settings, matrilineality cannot work in quite the same way as it did in a traditional setting. Even the Nayar Tarawads are disintegrating because new legislation has altered the underlying principle of marriage and has conferred on individuals the right to a share in ancestral property. Taking into account self-earned property, the Khasis have also been initiating changes in their law. However, matrilineal ideology is not likely to be totally eroded because women who will continue to perpetuate the line, will have a share in ancestral property, and will demand the status and respect that was conferred on them by their traditional norms and values. In respect of role allocation, distinction is made between "men's work" and "women's work" (Dube 110). The management of the household invariably

remains within women's sphere. If they cannot hire domestic help (as only a few can afford it), women must handle all the domestic chores like drawing water, cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes of men and children as well as their own, and looking after the children. Men are usually ridiculed if found undertaking any of these functions. A man may do so only when the wife is away or ill and if there is no other woman to take charge. This notion is so deeply ingrained that even working women are expected to continue looking after household affairs in addition to their jobs. Notably, many women have a sense of inadequacy, if not of guilt, when they cannot attend to their domestic responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to look after the affairs of the world outside the home. They are expected to provide for the family and to function as arbiters of its discontents and conflicts. However in the lower strata of society women have a substantial share in the economic pursuits of the family. They may not till the land, but contribute in diverse ways in agricultural operations. Women in the families of artisans have well-defined roles in carrying out the traditional craft. Their contribution to the household economy thus, cannot be ignored. In social groups at the higher rung of society, men used to be the providers, but even this scenario is undergoing change as women are entering public services and professions thereby earning as much as men do. The trend has to be accepted; partly because of increasing cost of living and the demands of higher-standard of living. The emerging ethos does not favor patriarchy, but the vestiges of the past refuse to disappear completely.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QA i) Name a society which follow matrilieany.

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QA ii) What is meant by gender discrimination ?

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2.5 GENDER JUSTICE

Gender Justice' is a wider concept that takes in its sweep every facet of life. For centuries, in fact ever since known history, we have been living in a patriarchal (with some notable exceptions) and feudal society which assigns to women a subordinate position in the social hierarchy. "Women may be respected and loved, but they have been confined to home and home-making, and looking after the children, the sick and the elderly in the family, most of the unpaid work in the world is done by women. Their lack of socio-economic independence has led to their exploitation. But a new awareness of this exploitation and the need to restructure society on a more just basis has led to serious attempts to reform and transform our social, moral, economic and political structure, including our legal and constitutional framework."' Equality of sexes and gender justice have indeed made very slow progress. The subordination of women to men has subsisted through the millennia in all societies and countries without exception. It is only now at the beginning of 21st century that these twin factors are being increasingly recognised and rectified. In the views of Prof Amartya Sen, "Empirical research in recent years has brought out clearly the extent to which women occupy disadvantaged positions in traditional economic and social arrangements. While gender inequalities can be observed in Europe and North America (and in Japan), nevertheless women's relative deprivation is much more acute in many parts of the 'Third World' countries.

Naila Kabeer explained "Gender, for instance, can be seen to have a political-economy dimension in that, it is key structuring principle in the distribution of labour, and property and other valued resources in a society. It structures the division between productive and reproductive labour, giving women the primary responsibility for the latter. It structures an unequal distribution of land and property in many societies so that women either receive no rights to property, few rights than men or else their entitlements are mediated by male family members. It also structures the labour market, generally assigning men to higher-paid, formal sector and managerial positions and women to lower paid, casual work, often in various forms of

self-employment. “According to Professor Anne Philips, “Sexual differences has almost always been associated with inequality: what marks women as different from men are also taken to mark them as of lesser value. The history of cultural difference is in some ways less depressing, already throwing up occasional examples of that more egalitarian respect for difference that has mostly evaded the relationship between the sexes.”’’ “There is widespread and Deeping attention to the promotion of democracy and the fulfillment of human rights in ways that recognize the importance of gender justice.” From women’s point of view, there is a further disadvantage with markets. “Since markets cannot recognize the value of goods and services which have no price, they cannot take into account the unpaid work that is mainly done by women in caring for families and reproducing the labor force market-based entitlements are thus inherently male-biased and women are penalized because much of their work is non-market work.” According to UNIFEM report, “In industry and services, women on average typically only earned about 78 percent of what men earned in the late 1990s.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QB) Fill in the blanks

i) Women on average typically only earned about……. of what men earned in the late 1990s.

ii) Women’s relative deprivation is much more acute in many parts of the …….



LET US KNOW

Third world country: The developing countries are known as the third world countries.



2.6 LET US SUM UP

- Gender is a primary marker of social and economic stratification as a result, of exclusion.
- Regardless of one’s socioeconomic class, there are systematic gender differences in material well-being, although the degree of inequality varies across countries and over time.

- Gender discrimination as the name suggests is the unfair treatment meted out to a particular gender.
- It is often seen women are denied of opportunities due to their gender and they also experience of violation of their rights.
- Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male members as the primary authority is central.
- It refers to a system where men have authority over women, children and property.
- As an institution of male rule and privilege, patriarchy is dependent on female subordination.
- Historically, it has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic institutions of different cultures.
- Gender Justice' is a wider concept that takes in its sweep every facet of life.
- Their lack of socio-economic independence has led to their exploitation.
- But a new awareness of this exploitation and the need to restructure society on a more just basis has led to serious attempts to reform and transform our social, moral, economic and political structure, including our legal and constitutional framework.



2.7 FURTHER READING

1) Leela Menon, "Women and Social attitude", Kerla Calling, March 2004, p. 5.
2) Yojana 45, No. 8, August 2001, p. 4.
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5) Sharma Sheetal, "Empowerment of women and property, rights key to ruraldevelopment", Kurukshetra, 54, No. 8, June 2006, p47

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10) Nair S (2015) More gender inequality in India than Pakistan, Bangladesh: UN. The Indian Express.

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12) Gender Discrimination (2016) Editorial, Business Recorder.



2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to QA i) Khasi society

Answer to QA ii) Gender discrimination is the unfair treatment meted out to a particular gender

Answer to QB i) 78 percent

Answer to QB ii) Third world countries.



2.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer within 150 words)

Q i) Distinguish between matriarchy and matriliny.

Q ii) What is meant by gender justice ?

B) Long Questions (Answer within 300- 500 words)

i) Write an essay on Patriarchy.