

Resisting Gender Norms in Everyday Life: A Social Reproduction Perspective

Nidhi Mishra

CIE, DU

ABSTRACT

Gender equality and gender sensitivity is much probed in academia and in the society at large but we seldom recognize the subtle manifestation of patriarchy and domination in our day today life. The present paper is an attempt to trace the changed trajectory of the status and role of woman at the threshold of the new millennium. There is also a modest attempt to present an account of women's journey towards gender equality in the context of changing politico-economic background, which legitimise women's inequality and lack of agency in everyday reality. An effort is made to understand women's status in the society through larger questions such as: what are the issues confronting women in their march towards path of equality? Why, inspite of progress in education, is there evidence of gender discrimination? Why even after gaining substantial educational degree women are not found to be working in the paid domain? What efforts are being made to change the situation by women and the wider society? The answers to these questions are explored within the framework of social reproduction by gauging the understanding of young students of senior secondary classes from an urban school. The rationale behind choosing the school as a field of study is to gauge the understanding of students towards gender roles and how they resist gender roles in everyday reality. And also education as a discipline is entrusted with the onus of bringing change in the society at large, therefore the sample taken is senior secondary students. Social reproduction as a concept encapsulates all those activities involved in the production of life. This highlights the gendered social (reproductive) labour in the maintenance of everyday life and the costs attached to this, the structures of power that constraint or govern everyday life as well as the gendered forms of agency that shapes everyday reality. Indeed, it's relevant to understand that social reproduction is the everyday reality and resisting/problematising the micro-realities brings change in the larger discourse.

Key words: gender, patriarchy, agency, social reproduction.

INTRODUCTION

It's equally vociferous among the larger discourse and debates that girls are raised differently or rather like a son. This is what creates a bit problem at large. Why do we need such a strategy? Why girls have to be raised like boys? The pertinent questions to be answered would have been like: are the boys/men found resisting gender norms in their own individual ways? Are girls/ women exercising their agency? Are the boys equipped to live in a world where the girls are all they want to be? Are the boys still found to be refrained from being emotional? This paper goes on exploring that why women are still found to be associated with domestic and care work and what is the understanding of 'gender' and 'gender roles'. The paper also tries to find out the understanding towards resisting gender norms among the students of senior secondary students. The data is collected from a sample of 40 students of senior secondary level from a private school of Delhi. This paper aims to present the challenges facing women in India due to the Intersectionality of gender and other forms of identities which impacts their personal and public lives by exploring the intersection of gender, class, caste, religion. It also tries to link the present and prevailing understanding of gender with the challenges women face in pursuing their aspiration. It is evident that Indian women are marginalized in their access to education and healthcare, and they are also compromised in their personal and professional development by being undervalued underemployed and under (un)rewarded. Along with the economic boom in the era of post globalization there has been a significant and visible socio-cultural impact of western influences challenging traditional values and beliefs in Indian Society and yet there has been consolidation and solidification of gender based roles and separate spheres.

The study tries to explore the understanding of patriarchy and the concept of unpaid care work among the students of senior secondary school of Humanities background from an urban area of Delhi. A sample of 40 students are taken randomly which includes both boys and girls. The sample is taken from the Humanities stream considering that they have more sociological understanding over the issue of Gender. The sample cuts across the caste and class line.

The paper also tries to gauge the ways through which the gender norms are resisted in private and public sphere by interrogating certain questions such as: Are we equipping our boys to deal with a world where the girls are all they want to be and more? Are we telling the boys that they have to be the bread winner of the family? Are we discouraging boys from the feminine pursuits? Do still the girls bear the onus of tradition, custom and rituals? Are we using 'girl' as an epithet when they show fear or emotion? Girls are raised as boys but are the boys raised as girls? Such kind of questions tries to problematize the subtleties of patriarchy. We need to understand how Patriarchy engenders false consciousness in all the sexes and genders.

The rationale behind the study is to explore how the young generation understand gender and gender roles in their everyday life and the role of education in shaping their understanding towards gender and gender roles. The rationale is drawn from the Gender Equality and Equity Report, 2000, which says; "the time is past when a women's movement had to exclude men in the fight "against" patriarchy. The time has come rather for women's visions to restructure and redefine work in order to fashion a new society for women and men based on women's experience and skills as care-givers and reproducers."

Inequality is writ large in our society. In its annual Global Gender Gap Report(2020), India continues to be ranked poorly in terms of improving the gender gaps. The transfer of women's work from household to public/ commercial employment is among the most notable features of economic development. Yet India is marked by abysmally low and falling female labour force participation. The Gov. of India report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) published by NSSO estimated female labour force participation at 23.3 percent in 2017-18. It means that three out of four women aged 15 years and above are not working nor seeking work. (Oxfam India Inequality Report). A common explanation provided for this is, the more number of girls are enrolled in education but it is found that women aged between 35-39 years, around 33 percent are reported as not working in 2017-18. There appears to be a mismatch between demand and supply, there is lack of decent jobs for educated youths especially women. Social norms also pose big hurdles the kind of jobs that women and young girl can take up.

The unpaid care work is the biggest barrier to paid employment for women. Most women in the prime working age category (between 30 to 50 years) reported attending to domestic duties only, which refers to running of the household and taking care of children and/ or elderly relatives. Unpaid care work is the hidden engine that keeps the wheels of our economies, business and societies keep moving. The issue of unpaid care work is central to women's economic empowerment and in exercising their agency. Women are more focused on removing the gender power imbalance by emphasizing personal empowerment in making their own choices and decisions in life often against the wishes of their family members. While this change is visible in most urban areas, rural India still has a long way to go (Chanana, 2003) Indian society traditionally has perpetuated a deeply ingrained ideological view of "women as wives and mothers and subordinate partners in domestic life" (Nambisan 2005). Young girls are brought up with the clear message of "Pita, Pati, Putra" (Father, Husband, Son) That in childhood she must follow the command of her father, in marriage she must follow the command of her husband and in widowhood she must follow the command of her sons. Daughters are brought up with the message that they are but a guest in their maternal home and that their rightful place is in their husband's family, after marriage, which she can only leave upon death (a religious backing). The journey from the Wedding ceremony to the "arthi" is often ingrained into young girls as the measure of a successful life. The most honored role of a woman in the Indian tradition is that of a devoted wife, praying and fasting for the long life of her husband, wishing to die as a "suhaagan" (Married woman) and that of motherhood, in bearing his sons. (Coonrod, 1998).

Professional women in India come primarily from the privileged of class. In a study of middle-class, professional women in Delhi, Liddle and Joshi (1986) found that they have the benefits of higher education, occupation and income of the family have a considerable impact on women being educated and taking up employment. Being a professional woman brings with it financial independence that contributes to a women's confidence and self-esteem, and recognition within the community and family. Among the educated, urban Indians, there is less stigma associated with having a daughter and parents are more actively encouraging daughters to pursue careers. The Western feminist model is based on individualism while Indian Society is categorized as collectivist (Hofstede, 1984, 1991) therefore, self-centered decision-making in terms of exercising personal power in education, family and career choices, does not fit well in the

Indian context, where women envision equality that is inclusive of their traditional family-centered roles and that also incorporated their career aspirations (Budhwar et al. 2005).

For women in India, marriage is inevitable and motherhood is expected, beyond this they also have to fulfill their responsibility to their family, their in-laws family as well as extended families on both sides. These roles are intrinsic to the Indian woman. Work-life balance issues, while important to all women world-wide, need further flexibility in the balance issues, while important to all women worlds-wide, need further flexibility in the Indian context in order to accommodated extended family responsibilities for women in caring for their children, their parents as well as their parents-in-law and the extended family where a woman's obligations are deeply embedded in culture and traditions and not only this meeting these traditional roles is valued above their educational achievement, professional work, personal accomplishment and job satisfaction, In fact, many well educated Indian women choose not to work outside their home in compliance with the wishes of their parents, husband, in-laws, or extended family members. Understandably, many are reluctant to travel, avoid transfers and living away from the family, but even those who do must first secure familial support (Nath, 2000).

Social Reproduction: an approach to understand gender

Writing on the gendered division of labor, feminists use social reproduction to refer to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and inter-generationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work-mental, manual, and emotional-aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation. And the organization of social reproduction refers to the varying institutions within which this work is performed, the varying strategies for accomplishing these tasks, and the varying ideologies that both shape and are shaped by them. Social reproduction has also been used to signal the social nature of procreation and/or population processes in general; one of its meanings, therefore, is demographic. Feminists consider that procreation is a social, not merely a biological, event, but they argue that while procreation is a key component of it, the work of social reproduction includes much more than procreation. In a other way, social reproduction refers to the perpetuation of entire social systems, that is, to societal reproduction. The feminist concept of social reproduction broadens its definition to include the work of maintaining existing life and reproducing the next generation. It therefore involves more than production as Marxist theory has defined it. Second, feminists who use the concept of social reproduction do so in order to understand the perpetuation and reproduction of systems of gender inequality, in relation to but different from the reproduction of systems of class inequality. In the feminist argument, renewing life is a form of work, a kind of production, as fundamental to the perpetuation of society as the production of things. Moreover, the social organization of that work, the set of social relationships through which people act to get it done, has varied widely and that variation has been central to the organization of gender relations and gender inequality. From this point of view, societal reproduction includes not only the organization of production but the organization of social reproduction, and the perpetuation of gender as well as class relations. Using the concept of social reproduction in this way allows us to ask new questions and to view old distinctions in new ways. For example, viewing social reproduction as work, feminists have argued that in capitalist societies, the unpaid domestic work of women converts wages into means of subsistence. Without it, wage workers could not continue to engage in productive works (Mees 1986).

Gender: Theoretical Basis

Learning theories of gender is important here to help us to become a better thinker who can articulate one's voice on issues of gender in our everyday life. We begin with the theories of gender by looking at feminism and its influence on sociological ways of thinking about gender. When one thinks of feminism, the names that comes one's mind are Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Adrienne Rich as the growth of feminism is usually attributed to Western influences. No doubt that these spokeswomen set out the task of theorizing the needs of women in a society by giving voice to the voiceless.

But we cannot see history in a monolithic universal set frames by ignoring the cultural differences. The needs of women are conditioned by societal, familial, marital, economic, religion and cultural markers. In such a diverse context, it would be wrong to associate and interpret Indian feminism with the Western feminism, which is marked by norms and culture. In the words of Jasbir Jain in *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* who says that feminism is more than a voice of protest or questioning. It is moral self reflection, a conquering of inner fears and a realization of self –worth by no abandoning values or relationships, but goes on to create new ones. The feminist discourse in India has been shaped by our colonial past and our struggle to foreign domination. Along with Independence movement, the Indian feminism has

carved its path by creating space for women by fighting against cultural impositions and religious restrictions in its own unique way.

What is Gender and Why Should We care About it?

Beginning to reveal the invisible ways in which gender works, which are not always apparent on the surface of our lives, this is what Judith Lorber (1994) means when she describes gender as being like water to fish. In ‘Night to his Day’, Judith Lorber highlights the paranoia of classifying the gender of person at the time of birth itself. She shows how the idea of adorning a child with earring is an endeavour to portray a difference and assigning gender roles. Our learning to see gender means developing a special kind of vision. Gender may be socially constructed, but it is also a system of inequality. We know that gender has real consequences for the lives of women and men around the world. Gender distributes power to people. How much leisure time one has? When we begin to see gender around us, we will also begin to see the ways in which gender sometimes works to help some and hurt others. “Why study gender?” is that understanding of gender and is the first step toward deciding what needs to be challenged and changed.

Feminist scholars argue that, like class, gender constitutes one of the basic dimensions of all social organization. Gender refers to socially constructed and historically variable relationships, cultural meanings, and identities through which biological sex differences become socially significant. Gender is seen, not as structurally determined, but as the outcome of women's and men's actions under historically specific conditions. More than an individual characteristic, gender refers to the social relationships between women and men that shape personal identity. In addition to being constructed and re-constructed interactionally, gender is institutionalized in, for instance, families (Brenner & Laslett 1986), schools (Hansot & Tyack 1988), politics (Nelson 1989), culture and ideology (Douglas 1977; Scott 1987), the labor market and the workplace (see, for instance, Baron 1990; Cockburn 1983; Groneman & Norton 1987; John 1986; Milkman 1985; Rose 1986, 1987, 1988). The understanding on gender and prevalent stereotype roles in the society is gauged from the participants through interview and their take is quantified and analysed.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA AS OBTAINED FROM THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Analysis of interpretation of results obtained from 6 interview questions as prepared in the interview schedule have been presented here along with findings and interpretations.

Item 1: What do you understand by the term Gender?

Table – 1

CATEGORY	F	P
1. Biological identity	24	80%
2. Different roles for girls and boys	3	20%
3. boys and girls	3	20%

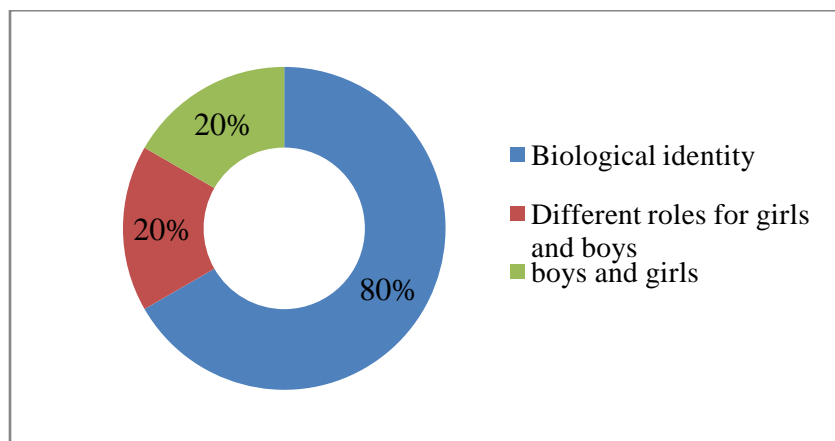


Chart :1

Interpretation: It's worth mentioning here that the participants are from Humanities background. The understanding of gender is not clear to most of the participants and they relate it to the biological identity.

Item 2: Who does the most work at home?

Table – 2

CATEGORY	F	P
1.mother	18	60%
2. mother- father both	12	20%
3. help at home	12	20%

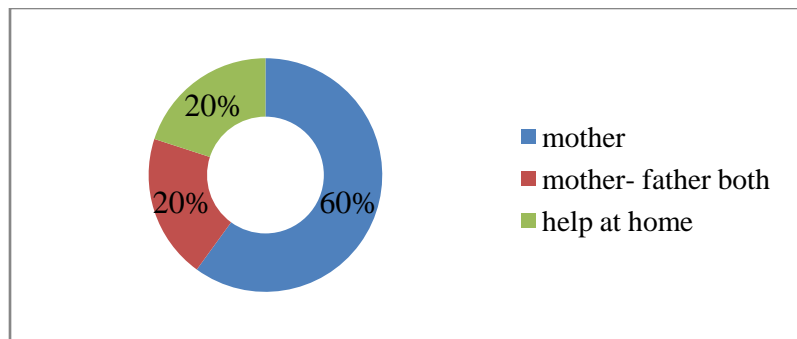


Chart :2

Interpretation:it is clear here that most of the work at home is performed by mothers. In few of the cases its both male and female who perform the household work. It can be interpreted here that women are largely devoid of ‘leisure’ time as either they are working at home or looking into both public and private domain.

Item 3: When a child is born in your family or relative what is the first question do you ask?

Table – 3

CATEGORY	F	P
1. Is it a Boy or girl?	24	60%
2. about mother’s health	3	10%
3.both mother and child’s health	9	30%

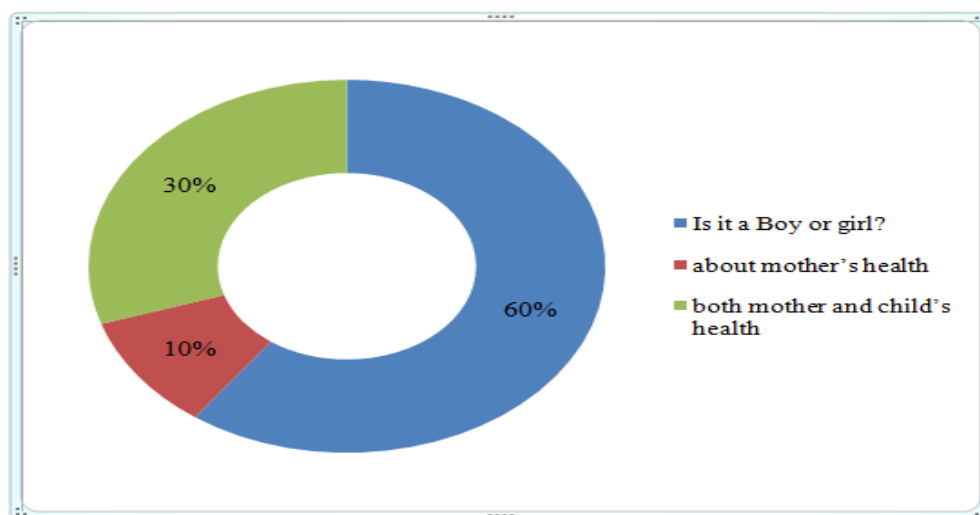


Chart :3

Interpretation:the gender roles are constructed through socialization and family is the primary agency for inculcation of prescribed normative behaviours among the new members in the family. The first instance is seen through categorizing the new born as male or female and then associating the various Do’s and Dont’s.

Item 4: who do you think, a girl/boy is best suited for certain professions, such as teaching, nursing, gynaecology?

Table – 4

CATEGORY	F	P
1.girls best suited for the above professions	18	60%
2. both girls and boys equally suited	9	30%
3. only boys suited for the above professions	3	10%

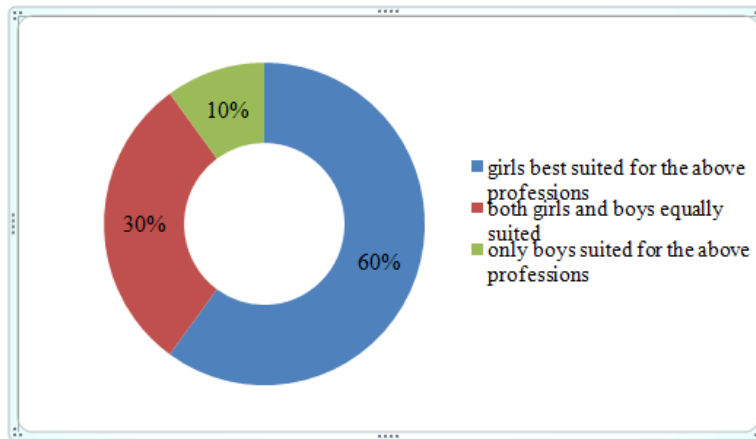


Chart :4

Interpretation:the professions which are associated with care work are best suited for girls as it was found through interaction that women are naturally endowed with care giving attributesand are more caring, compassionate and warm in their approach.

Item 5:Who is the decisionmaking authority at your home?

Table – 5

CATEGORY	F	P
1.both mother and father but father's decision is final	24	80%
2. always father	3	10%
3. both mother and father	3	10%

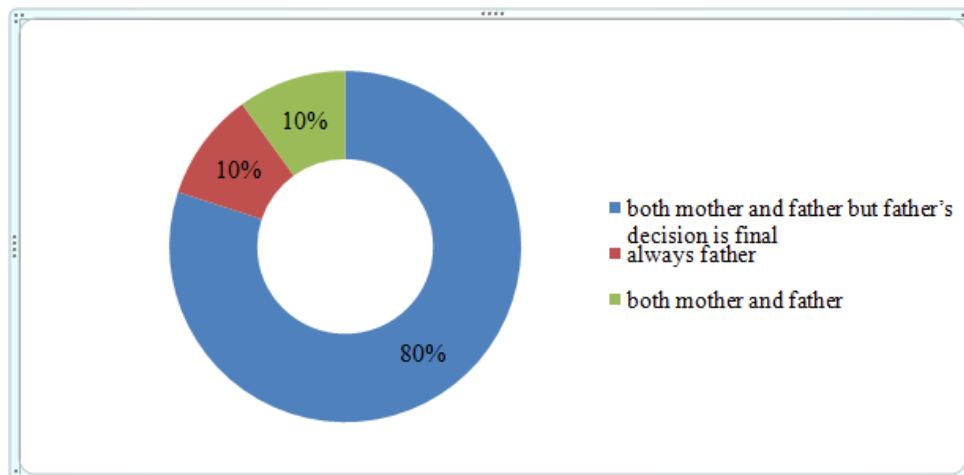


Chart : 5

Interpretation:

Through the responses generated it was found that in most of the households the decision making authority is vested with the male member of the family, women were found to participate in the various discussions at home but the final say is in the hand of male members. It was quoted by one of the participants that *“papa jokahtehaiwohihotahaiaur mummy unse pooch kar hi koi kaamkartihai”*.

Item 6:how do you look at the given statement in a book where girls are shown as milking cow, climbing on a tree and riding motorbike whereas boys are cleaning the floor, stitching the cloth and cooking meal for family

Table – 6

CATEGORY	F	P
1.Role reversal is shown	18	60%
2. challenging the gender stereotypical roles	6	20%
2. Its not real	3	20%

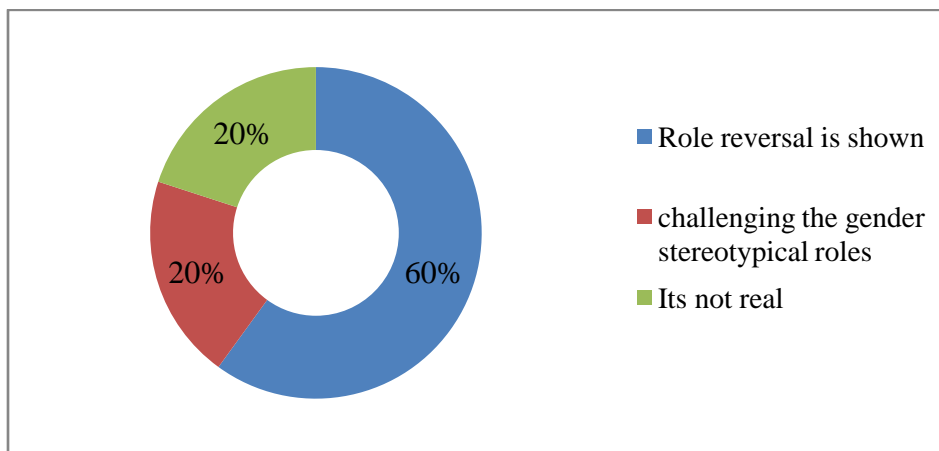


Chart :6

Interpretation:the given statement was not found as normal and was mentioned as *“sab ultadikhayahuahai”*. The given roles are not seen as representing the real picture of the society. It shows the gendered socialization and the way roles and tasks are assigned on the basis of one’s biological identity which are normative but taken/ defended as natural.

What is Patriarchy?

In simple understanding it means the rule of the father. Bhasin(2003) says, patriarchy is that subtle experience of discrimination, bias or non –acceptance which one can feel but unable to name it. When the girls/boys were asked to respond on patriarchy they couldn’t explain it but very well feel it. Many of them said it is the rule of father but on the contrast, this rule of father was accepted as normal and rule of mother rather taken as different and non normal.

There were also one of the responses that *“my family wasn’t that happy as I heard the way they were jubilant when my brother was born.”* So here it is clearly an instance of ‘son preference’ Sen, (2015). The fights among the parents were also accounted by some girls. Another mentioned that the mother is a teacher in the same school so it’s easier for her mother to manage both public life and household chores. This can be taken as normalizing and naturalising the ‘double burden’ concept.

As one begins to reflect on them the fragments of these experiences gradually start forming pattern, and each one has had to struggle in one way or another against this discrimination. Walby,(1993), in her book, ‘Theorizing Patriarchy’ calls it *“a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”* This understanding of patriarchy as a system rejects the notion of biological determinism that men and women are naturally different from each other due to their bodily features. It is seen that men control women’s productivity both within the household and outside, in paid work. (Bhasin, 2003). Within the household, women provide all kind of free service to their children, husband, and old persons. Walby (1990), calls the ‘patriarchal mode of production’ where women’s labour is expropriated by others and house wives are termed as ‘producing class’. In most of the responses it was found that, family which is the basic unit of society is where the patriarchy is at ease. A man is the head of the family. There is

hierarchy in which man is superior and dominant and women is subordinate. And it is the family which is the basic seat of socialisation from where boys learn to assert and dominate, girls to be submissive, but the nature and control of men differ in different families. It is worth mentioning Gerda Lerner (1986), that family plays an important role in creating a hierarchical system and keeping a balance in society.

On exploring how patriarchy affects boys and men it was found that boys are also disadvantaged by patriarchy. The boys who are docile, unaggressive, soft spoken and humble suffer from bullying by their classmates and labeled as 'chakka'(transgender) who possess feminine qualities. Like girl/ women they are put into stereotypes. There wasn't any example found where male was solely found to be looking after family and women found to be working in public domain only. There were families where both the parents were found working in the paid domain or either women only looking after the family and kids. An educated man if found looking after domestic chores is looked with contempt and disgrace but the other way is not the same. Its absolutely normal and acceptable if an educated woman is only charged with domestic works.

How Does Gender Affect The Type of Work You Do?

On exploring the understanding over the issue of gender categorization and gendered work with the help of questions such as Did anyone ever tell you that you couldn't be what you wanted to become because of your gender? How do certain jobs get defined in more or less gendered ways? Are men more invested in a high-paying job, and why would that be? Is there any profession defined for men and women? How does gender impact how well people do in the jobs? Is there any glass ceiling for women? Does gender have an impact on who gets hired for a job? What would a workplace without gender look like?

It was found acceptable and justified among the students the exclusion of women from certain kind of job such as armed forces, front desk work, jobs demanding night shift with lot mobility. It showed the normalization of the notion of sexual division of labour, masculinity being attached to physical strength. But here comes the question of how far can one go with the segregated spaces.

CONCLUSION

After exploring the understanding towards gender and resting gender norms in this paper, the attachment to the gender identities among the students has not come as a surprise. The gendered lives begin even before we leave the womb, and we enter societies that have already made decisions about how our sex and gender will be determined. Also the culture dictates exactly what gender lessons we learn (Robin, 2014). Within the families, parents, siblings, and other relatives surround us with subtle messages about what it means to be a gendered person. The gender stereotyping is harmful to all as the individuals are indoctrinated within the gender system. Gender is all around us, and it quickly gets internalized through socialization process which makes it a social phenomenon. And if gender is source of inequality then there should be efforts to change gender as a social system. And there it becomes pertinent for all to ask oneself that what is gender? Why does gender inequality exist? What could be the best method for reducing gender inequality?

The time is to endorse own particular theory of gender and to ask oneself how much one is gendered in interaction, doing things, clothing etc. Any positive change comes from the basic unit of society, that is, family. The boys of those families where the household chores are not gendered, they appeared to be more sensitive towards gender equality. The issue of unpaid care work is central to women's economic empowerment. There has to be some statistical system to measure such work used for accounting in economic growth. The young generations are resisting gender norms in their own ways but they are unaware from the subtle manifestation of patriarchy. In the time of various of online feminist movements such as # 'me too' movement, 'pinjratod' movement etc. we all need to resist gender stereotyping and norms as its toxic for both male and female and society at large.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bhasin, K. (2004). *Understanding Gender*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- [2]. Bhasin, K. (2003). *What is Patriarchy*. Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- [3]. Bem, S, L. (1993). *The Gender Lenses*. Yale University Press, London.
- [4]. Butler, J., (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.
- [5]. Beasley Chris. 1999. *What is Feminism: An introduction to Feminist Theory*. Sage New Delhi
- [6]. Chanana, K. (2003), "*Visibility, gender, and the careers of women faculty in an Indian University*", *McGill Journal of Education, Fall*



- [7]. Coonrod, C. (1998),“ *Chronic hunger and the status of women in India*”. June, available at: *WWW.Thp.org/reports/indiawomen.htm* (accessed October 15, 2006).
- [8]. Desai, S. (1994), *Gender Inequality and Demographic Behaviour; India, The Population Council New York, NY.*
- [9]. Dube, L. (2 001). *Anthropological Explorations in Gender*, Sage pub.
- [10]. Dube,S, C. *Men’s and Women’s role in India*, Barbara Ward .
- [11]. Harcourt, W. (2000). *Gender Equality and Equity Report*, UNESCO.
- [12]. Jain, J. (2011). *Indigenous Roots Of Feminism- Culture, Subjectivity and Subjectivity*. Sage pub.India.
- [13]. Lerner, G. (1986). *The Creation of Patriarchy*, OUP
- [14]. Laslett, B. and Berber, J.(1989). *Gender and Social Reproduction in Annual Review of Sociology*.
- [15]. Nambisan, S. (2005). *Effeective Enforcement of social legislations Pertaining to Women*, availableat:<http://hrm.iimb>. (accessedAprial 2007).
- [16]. Sen, A. (2015). *The Country Of First Boys*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [17]. V.Geetha. (2002). *Gender*. Stree, Kolkata,2002
- [18]. Walby, S.1990. *Theorising Patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK