



STORIES OF GENDER AND WORK: GENDER-NEUTRAL AND GENDERED WORK DOMAINS

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Abstract

The study entitled “Gender and Work: A Study of Clerks in Government Offices” is an ethnographic study. In this study, I concentrated on clerks who are people engaged with files, and maintaining records in various departments and in government ministries.

It looks at the aspects of gender and work in the working life of both men and women Clerks in two government offices in New Delhi and reveals gender-neutral and gendered domains. The central question that I pursue in the research study is how gender affects work at the workplace. I delve into this question by inquiring into the lives of Clerks and their seniors and employees junior to Clerks in order to understand the structure of mobility, gradations, and limits within which clerks viewed their work lives. The field sites chosen for the study were – the Director’s Office (Administration) in an Agricultural Institute and, the Branch Office of the Ministry of Finance. Clerks were chosen for the study because there is scarce research work on Clerks in government offices that address their work-related problems and issues in India.

In this article, I will be focusing on the concept of gender and the sociological approaches to work. The main aim of the article is to explore two domains in the workplace encountered by clerks and employees at adjacent posts- Gender-neutral and Gendered work domains. Then I will proceed to narrative accounts on the issue that how gender affects work.

Keywords: gender, workplace, gender-neutral and gendered domains.

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How are gender and work conjoined? Like gender, work is an important aspect of lived experience and the focus of this study. Work here is defined as “what we do for a living” (Strangleman and Warren 2008: 1).

The first section of the article focuses on gender. The second section defines the sociological approaches to work. The third section outlines the prevalence of a gender-neutral and gendered work domain perceived in the working lives of Clerks in government offices. In the fourth section, I have concentrated on the narrative accounts from two field sites – The Institute and The Branch Office.

REVISITING GENDER

Gender refers to the socially learned behaviour and expectations that distinguish masculinity and femininity. We learn that ‘gender is a process’ that materializes through culture-specific socialization (Butler 1990). Butler (ibid: 10) defines gender in relation to sex as the “discursive/ cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or a ‘natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive’, prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts”. In other words, gender is to be understood as a social construction (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 5). Do genders such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ stand in an oppositional relation to each other? West and Zimmerman (2002: 3) note that “sex is ascribed by biology and gender is an achieved status, which is constructed through psychological, cultural and social means”. We also observe that in the study of Clerks, greater value is assigned to masculinity and lesser value to femininity, such that the two form a hierarchical relationship in society and at the workplace. Gender is a ‘situated doing’ (ibid: 4), that shapes how we identify ourselves, how others identify and relate to us and how we are positioned within social structures (Peterson and Runyan 1993). Goffman (1976 as cited in West and Zimmerman 2002: 7) views “gender as a socially scripted dramatization of the culture’s idealization of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom”.

In what follows, I have borrowed the ideas of Butler (1990) and Goffman (1979) to suggest that gender is present everywhere and it is possible to see its execution in the interaction between human beings. In society, we display our genders as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ through our ‘expressive behaviour’. These expressions are socially learned and socially patterned. Gender display, according to Goffman (1979: 8), “can reflect fundamental features of the social structure. Displays are a symptom”.

De Beauvoir (1953) identifies woman as the second sex. She explains the stages in a woman’s life. Through the socialization process, a girl is accustomed to the concept of male domination. According to her, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir *ibid*: 293). She explains, further, that ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are two opposite worlds. “Women have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position; they are united by a mechanical solidarity only insofar as they are similar: they do not share that organic solidarity upon which any unified community is founded” (ibid: 653). In fact, three main points of view appear in her text – biological, psychoanalytical, and historical materialism - that are woven into her writing.

The biological view, which she develops (de Beauvoir 1953: 21), suggests that “males and females are two types of individuals who are differentiated within one species for the purposes of reproduction; they can be defined only correlatively”. She asserts that a woman’s body is considered inferior, is enslaved to man, with limited individual abilities, but “it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society” (ibid: 21).

In my research study on clerks, I found a similar view since all patriarchal ideologies are inculcated in a girl right from childhood through the socialization process. These ideologies are further found in institutions such as the workplace. de Beauvoir (1953: 727-738) argues that “it is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom. Still, most working women do not escape the traditional feminine world; neither society nor their husbands give them the help needed to become, in concrete terms, the equals of men”.

The psychoanalytical view holds that “as a very young girl, she identifies with her father; she then experiences feelings of inferiority relative to man and is faced with the alternative of either maintaining her autonomy, becoming virilized – which, with an underlying inferiority complex, provokes a tension that risks bringing on neurosis – or else finding happy self-fulfillment in amorous submission, a solution facilitated by the love she felt for her sovereign father; it is he whom she is looking for in her lover or husband, and her sexual love is mingled with her desire to be dominated. Maternity will be her reward; restoring her new kind of autonomy” (de

Beauvoir 1953: 55).

The perspective of historical materialism evident in the famous work of Engels *'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State'* (1948) also runs through Beauvoir's (1953) analysis. "Private property appears: masters of slaves and land, man also become the proprietor of the woman. This is the 'great historical defeat of the female sex' due to the division of labour brought about by the invention of new tools. So, paternal right replaces maternal right. Transmission of property is from father to son. This is the advent of the patriarchal family founded on private property" (de Beauvoir 1953: 64).

Gendered divisions in society are often the product of patriarchies that are prevalent in the work environment as well. Walby (1990: 20) defines patriarchy "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women".

Walby (1990) discusses patriarchy and its structures in relation to Western societies, particularly Britain. There have been changes in the degree and form of patriarchy. A movement from private to the public form of patriarchy is evident over the last century. "Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. In private patriarchy, the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form, it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy, the principal patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public, it is segregationist and subordinating" (ibid: 24). She further distinguishes between the strategies of exclusion and segregation. "The exclusion strategy is aimed at totally preventing women's access to an area of employment, or indeed to all paid employment; the segregation is a weaker strategy aimed at separating women's from men's work and at grading the former beneath the latter for purposes of remuneration and status" (ibid: 53). In Clerical work in Britain, a segregation strategy was practiced "to minimize direct competition between men and women, while still allowing women to be a source of cheaper labour for employers in other grades" (ibid: 54).

In my research study, women clerks are part of both private and public patriarchy. While applying the concept of public patriarchy to Indian government services, I find that segregation and subordination do not work here at the formal level. The

government encourages both men and women to join the services of the government of India, though one can find the segregationist and subordinating strategy in the behaviour of the employees. I look into whether women clerks accept a lower position in the workforce in order to look after their domestic activities.

Like Beauvoir and Walby, Bradley (2013: 16) also emphasizes that the "gender arrangement in society is hierarchical and asymmetrical: men are the dominant gender. Women are those (inferior) who are not men". The central question of this thesis, 'how gender affects work', is also stressed by Bradley (ibid: 6) since she insists that "gender affects every aspect of our personal lives. All the institutions which make up our society (marriage, families, schools, workplaces, clubs, and political organizations) are themselves gendered and are locations in which the gendering of individuals and relationships takes place". She discusses early feminist ideas and notions of social construction and deconstruction which point to the breakdown of binary categories. The post-modernist feminist, Butler (1990) sees "both sex and gender as inextricably linked and are created in tandem through daily acts of 'playing out' male or female identity" (Bradley 2013: 20-21). For Butler, gender is 'performativity' and lies in how we perform gender in our everyday lives as masculine and feminine, as also evident in the lives of clerks.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO WORK

Strangleman and Warren (2008) in *'Work and Society'* focus on sociological approaches to the study of work and employment. Marx saw work as necessary to human existence and in terms of social relations. Working lives in society passed through various stages – primitive, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Marx explored that in the capitalist system of production, the bourgeoisie (capitalist) exploit the labour-power of the proletariat (workers). Marx focused on the antagonistic relations between the capitalist and the worker. In such an economy, work also becomes so specialized that it leads to a state of alienation where the worker is alienated from the product of his labour, the process of production, his fellow workers, and himself.

Like Marx, Durkheim in his famous work *Division of Labour in Society* (1933), too focused on the shift from simple societies to complex societies. In simple societies, the social order was based on mechanical solidarity, where there was a simple division of labour. With the increasing division of labour, the social order became complex and based

on organic solidarity. In industrial societies, individuals were dependent on others and the division of labour in such a society was based on meritocratic principles. The individual was isolated from society, which Durkheim called the state of 'anomie' or a lack of attachment. This state of anomie is also visible in the lives of Clerks and senior officials like superintendents when they feel disoriented vis-a-vis their work due to lack of promotion and pay scales.

Weber analyzed the relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity in his book *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. Work was considered a duty in his analysis and a sign of being chosen by God. This highly disciplined work regime paved the way for capitalism. This was a highly rational and calculated action. Further, Weber went on to analyze bureaucracy as a mode of organization (Weber 1930).

Turning specifically to gender and work, Kaila (2005) looks at the problems of working women. She focuses on case studies of women in private companies. The discrimination against female employees is prevalent in the form of male employees being preferred for promotion, inadequate job training for females, and managers who are not comfortable working with females. There are suggestions and strategies for coping with these problems, which include equal treatment of men and women, appointments for part-time work, and making the work environment free from sexual abuse and harassment. The role of human resource management in private companies to combat the problems of employees is also stressed. Issues like the majority of women being absent from the top positions are emphasized (Peterson and Runyan 1993; Kaila 2005). This is due to the gender stereotypes prevalent in the workplace because of which we see that leadership activity is generally associated with masculinity.

Patel (2009) brings out the marginalized status of women in national and global organizational contexts. She defines the workplace as "the physical space where women and men work outside and inside the home. Workspace means physical space but more recently it refers to 'hidden' spaces where women and men find themselves at work. In a physical workplace or workspace, women are subjected to various forms of gender discrimination on an ongoing basis"

(Patel 2009: 231). The concepts of the glass ceiling, glass walls, and fluid floors formed a part of the corporate culture. These are subtle forms of gender discrimination. Wood (as cited in Patel 2009: 232) defines a "glass ceiling¹ as referring to the invisible barrier that limits the advancement of women minorities while glass walls refer to sex segregation on the job and is associated with traditional feminine roles such as secretaries who are confined to the lower levels of the corporate ladder. The term 'fluid floor' refers to the unsteady surface on which the employee stands when the supervisor or team leader constantly expands and contracts the timelines and the nature of the task". Women have to accommodate the new policies introduced by their supervisors and have to keep in mind the goals and directives of the policies. The corporate culture is built up on a patriarchal ideology, where women whether working in higher or lower positions are ignored or overlooked. Often women have to deal with dysfunctional communication patterns that are associated with negative behaviour faced by women on the job and which act as an impediment to their progress.

Like Kaila, Pandya and Thakkar (2010) focus on the problems of working women in Baroda. These authors have concentrated on the physical and psychological stresses on the job, which adversely affect health, morale, and commitment. Pandya and Thakkar (ibid: 9), too, highlight the various kinds of oppressions faced by women² in the form of stares and teasing or mockery of male colleagues and their unnecessary remarks like "She is charming and that is why she was selected". The problems of women are discussed in relation to their age, type of family, experience, and distance from the home to their workplace. There is a comparison between young and old working women and their ability to do work. Young women can perform work more efficiently but their experience is less and domestic responsibilities are greater as their children are often young, whereas old working women are more confident in terms of work and domestic responsibilities, the authors observe, but may have health-related issues. The hurdles faced by women in nuclear families, in their view, exceed those of women in joint families. Women who are experienced are more confident and commit fewer mistakes. Women who stay far from the workplace spend more hours commuting and are not able to serve their family members. To understand the lives of clerks with respect to gender and work in government offices, I took in-

¹ The term has also been discussed by Kaila (2005).

² In my study too, I explore the issues of sexual harassment.

depth 104 interviews of clerks and adjacent posts (both senior and junior to clerks). I have used both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Among the primary method of data collection, I have used participant observation. I have conducted interviews that are semi-structured in nature. The study “Gender and Work: A Study of Clerks in Government Offices” is an ethnographic study.

In order to understand the place and significance of gender in government offices in relation to Clerks, it is important to discuss both the gender-neutral and gendered domains.

GENDER-NEUTRAL AND GENDERED WORK DOMAINS

While gender affects all aspects of life, it is useful to explore what is perceived to be gender-neutral and what is taken as gendered in the working life of Clerks.

I start by presenting the gender-neutral views expressed by Clerks in the field. Those who are pleased with their work, irrespective of their gender, were of the view that it is a government job and they enjoyed security here without any tensions. According to a middle-aged woman Clerk, “Clerks are reasonably happy, but wish to achieve more in life as cost and expenses are going up”.

A male Clerk opined:

“My interest was in something else but I came here because it is a government job and is secure. There is a social value attached to a government job...it is considered safe and prestigious regardless of whether it is high or low in the hierarchy as compared to a private job. Since my father and other relatives are also in government jobs, everyone emphasized this job’s security aspect”.

Another Clerk added:

“My aim was to work on a government job and to be selected by Staff Selection Commission (SSC) since childhood. There is merit to obtaining a job this way”.

Clerks, irrespective of gender, compared their jobs with the work culture of the private sector and thought they were doing well, relatively speaking. They were of the view that in the private sector, there is no job security, salaries are low given the large amount of work and if you make a mistake, then you are simply thrown out of the job. By contrast, in government jobs, you are served warnings that can, at most, affect your promotion or transfer.

Clerks complained about their frustrations at work, the lack of promotions, and low salaries. Problems faced by the Clerks at work certainly arose from

the lack of promotion avenues and a ‘good’ pay scale. For matters of promotion, the Clerks explained that they came under the administrative staff of the Institute, unlike the technical staff and scientists who could have back-dated promotions and were promoted after every five years.

However, scientists in the Institute came under ‘Group A’ (Gazetted Officers) and held higher education degrees (PhD. degrees) and were recruited through the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) whereas Clerks belonged to Group C, Assistants were Group B (non-Gazetted) and both categories were recruited through Staff Selection Commission. The Institute had not conducted any exam for Clerks or made fresh recruitment and even though there had been several retirements.

Clerks faced additional promotion problems since their serving time period against a post was increased from five to eight years. Most of the Lower Divisional Clerks (LDC) who were now Upper Divisional Clerks (UDC) argued that they required a minimum of six years’ experience as UDC to appear for the departmental examination for the post of an Assistant. Those who were LDCs opined that there should be a departmental examination at the level of LDC as well. Here, departmental examinations are envisaged as a kind of leveller. On the other hand, there were Clerks who did not appear for departmental examinations for which they were eligible. Some had never thought seriously of enhancing their careers while others claimed that they were deterred by the workload.

Besides these, other gender-neutral but work-related problems highlighted differences from the private sector. The lack of infrastructure in government offices was a common complaint. There was no space to keep records in the office. If things were available, then they were not maintained properly. For instance, bills were passed for an Aqua Guard (a brand of water purifier) and other things but the machines were not in working order. Thus, there was a lack of proper maintenance. Although money was spent on installing machines, these seldom functioned. Again, though the section officer kept a check on the section’s output, no one took a solid interest in preventing the abuse of government resources. For instance, paper in the department was misused. Both men and women used office paper like tissue paper to wipe their hands after lunch.

A superintendent commented on the issue of lack of space: “Earlier, we used to have separate cabins as superintendents. Now, there is a lack of space

and cabins. Rooms are snatched from us despite the fact that we are entitled to such space. We should have a decent and pleasant working environment. There should be a proper seating arrangement and a person should be there to hand over tea/coffee, as we have public dealings and people come to us from private companies like GE Capital and other big companies. When they come to discuss matters of adjudication with us we feel ashamed since there is no space (cabins) for them to sit comfortably and no office boys or peons to offer tea/coffee. This scarcity of infrastructure and poor ambience is part of government offices. It gives off negative vibrations for visitors coming from corporates and affects motivation negatively as well”.

These were gender-neutral comments on the working life of Clerks. Other observations centered on office conditions in relation to new technology. Age was a major factor in terms of acquiring knowledge of technology. Some men and women in the Branch Office felt that they did not have adequate computer knowledge due to which they were not able to perform their work efficiently. Men employees who lacked computer knowledge were generally old. However, women who were widowed and had been appointed on compassionate grounds in the department also lacked computer and work knowledge. Since they were older, they grasped things slowly. Further, the government did not provide any training for computer education after recruitment.

Though I could not find direct or formal discrimination on the basis of gender in government offices, there were differences between the genders which could be noticed in formal and informal terms. The benefits for women in terms of Child Care Leave (CCL) and recruitment on compassionate grounds made the formal rules different for women and men on these counts. Informally, women left their offices earlier than men. Women’s desks, again, were always orderly.

Differences in gender preferences were reflected in the choices men and women made for posts in government offices. I found that men preferred the post of inspectors and women preferred to be Deputy Office Superintendents (DoS) in the Branch Office. Women preferred this post because it involved supervisory work and not raids and field visits that were carried out largely by the men in the department. In the Institute too, women

preferred to stay away from field visits. The domain of official fieldwork had come to be dominated by men in government offices. I now move on to narratives from the field.

NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS

‘Gender conditioning happens at home and in society’: Sunita’s Example

Sunita, 59 is an Assistant in the Institute³. She got the job in the Institute in 1977 as a Lower Divisional Clerk (LDC). She applied for the job through the employment exchange. She gave a written test that covered politics, mathematics, and general knowledge and after clearing the written exam, she passed the typing test with 35 words per minute as her typing speed.

She got married in 1981. She had a M.A. and B.Ed. at the time of marriage and after marriage she took admission for doctoral study. However, she left it because of her children, as her husband said: “If you will pursue your studies, then who will look after the kids”. Sunita had a joint family at that time but it was her husband who had discouraged her from higher studies. At her job, she was promoted to Upper Divisional Clerk (UDC) after eight years, and she became an ‘Assistant’ after ten years by passing a departmental exam. As an ‘Assistant’, now Sunita had 32 years of experience. She had worked in different departments of the Institute and was enjoying the work. She was going to retire in the next month. I found her talkative and of jolly nature. Her present work included checking the cash book, tallying it, comparing it with the bank statement, and preparing the pay of various people in the Institute, looking after accounts, medical bills, Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) bills, pension cheques, and gratuity. Apart from official work, her interaction with seniors was limited to religious talk. The working hours of the Institute were from 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and she travelled by metro now. She reached home by 6:00 p.m. which saved her half-an-hour.

Sunita argues: “A home is very important for a woman...a woman is valuable in the home and housework is as important as office work...One has to manage both home and office at the same time. The social circle too has to be given equal value in terms of attending marriages, death ceremonies, visiting relatives’ homes, etc...Women should talk in a soft, polite and humble manner...women and men possess different characteristics, women are tolerant, cooperative, adjusting, religious, willing

post in the Institute.

³ Institute here refers to an Agricultural Institute. Assistant is a Group B non-Gazetted
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to sacrifice, and deal with the patriarchal mindset of the society because of the process of socialization which begins from childhood. They are powerful because they can perform domestic, reproductive and office-related work activities but women lack decision-making powers. It is men who are seen as breadwinners and as aggressive and knowledgeable...any final decision in the family is taken by men, or if it is collective, then the husband's consent is necessary”.

Through Sunita's narration, it was evident that she had compromised by withdrawing from higher studies. Now, she has two children and a grandson – a son, who is married and a daughter, who is doing a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) and is unmarried. She managed their home as her daughter-in-law was studying, an aspect that she encouraged. Sunita's attitude seems to be both liberal and conservative in this light. Her conservative ideas regarding patriarchy are reflected in how she views a woman as someone who adjusts, is submissive, and oriented to the household. The gender conditioning which happens in society or at home was carried over to the office, in her view, and yet she encouraged her daughter and daughter-in-law to study and work.

‘Gender does not affect work at the workplace but work at home’: Leela's Account

Leela is working as a Deputy Office Superintendent (Group B) in the Branch Office. She hails from Chennai. Gender discrimination, she observed, was prevalent in Chennai as well. When a girl is born, for instance, the fact was not celebrated. Her perspective on gender is that there is no gender equality though it should be there. There are not only physical differences but also cultural differences between the genders. Men try to suppress women and make them follow suit, for instance. She says that she laughs at home when her husband laughs. She cries when her husband cries. Her gestures at home are influenced by her husband's wishes. However, in the office, she observes, she is free to laugh at her will. In this sense, she feels relaxed at the workplace but not at home.

Leela feels that gender does not affect work at the workplace but gender affects work at home. She says: “Housework is not recognized. Women do the housework with affection. Women did not want anything in return but love and affection was necessary though, in her view, men did not even show affection to their children and wives. I do not count things which I am doing from morning till midnight. But men note the

homework they do. If men are asked to work at home, they get irritated. The water supply begins at 5:30 a.m. for which I have to get up even on Sundays. I also need rest and comfort but I do not get it. If I am ill I still have to do the housework. If groceries like salt, milk, sugar or any other item of the household have run out, then I have to run for that. My husband will not bring it. He will bring the items on the next day”.

She, further, argued that her father-in-law visits their home every three months. The father-in-law is attached to her but not to his son. Recently, her brother-in-law came to their home and said that Leela manages her home and office efficiently. At this point, Leela pointed out that her husband asked him why he was saying that. Her husband wanted to hide the fact that she was efficient. The decision-making power rests with her husband despite the fact that she earns as well. He dominated her and she did not want to argue with him because she thinks that that would make him angrier and his ‘male ego’ would be hurt. She has accepted her situation in the home and has become accustomed to it.

This story reveals that even working women are not able to gain a valued position in the family, in spite of their strong financial status. Women feel hesitant and insecure in raising their voices against dominant husbands. In fact, they accept their situations and become habituated to them. The silences of women give a boost to the ‘male ego’ and perhaps abet the domination. Leela highlighted various aspects of suppression, including not acknowledging the work done by her and her managing two places, the home and the workplace. There seems to be a constant struggle for working women at home where they are treated as belonging to the second sex and are not given equal status but they live with it.

‘Genders are not equal’: Virender's Story

Virender holds the post of an Assistant in the Institute. He entered the Institute as an LDC. After a promotion, he became a UDC and via a departmental exam, an Assistant. His interaction with the seniors in the office is limited to professional work. During lunchtime, he eats with his colleagues, gossips, and relaxes. He is satisfied with his work.

His family consists of his mother, father, wife, daughter, and son. His wife does not work in an office. He said that “he is a village person and believes in old customs to be followed at home...his wife is a housewife...when his parents

were looking for a match for him, he wanted his spouse to be a homemaker". He held the view that "genders are not equal and that there are physical and cultural differences between men and women. The duties of a man and a woman are different. The physical status of the woman has assigned her the role of a mother, accorded her a caring attitude and less strength. He thinks that women should not work outside and should only look after the home and children. If women work, then who will look after the kids?"

"One cannot leave the kids with maids, as you do not know how they will treat your children. These days, there are so many cases which various media channels and newspapers are bringing to our notice that maids sell children or give them some sedative medicines or use them for begging purposes or child abuse or they drink the milk and eat the food meant for the child in the absence of both parents. If both parents are working, then how will we keep a check on the maids' behaviour" he wonders.

In Virender's view, women have the power to give birth to a new life. God has given the gift of reproduction to women. He added, further, that since she has been gifted this power, she should look after the child because it is her duty. Who decides that it is the duty of women? When I asked Virender what kind of duties he performs in his house, he replied that he performs only those duties and tasks which lie within male boundaries.

He believes in the gendered division of labour at home, though in offices, he is gender-neutral. At the workplace, he assists female colleagues, only when he thinks that he should help them and if he thinks that the other person might become over-dependent on him, and then he prefers not to help. Virender contended that nowadays, women engage in negative practices like drinking alcohol, and smoking. He held that women are following men in these negativities. There should be a healthy and not unhealthy competition between women and men.

Gender inequality, in this account was made evident in the form of natural differences that emerged from roles in reproduction. Genders were not considered equal. Gender oppression was apparent as a form of patriarchy, an arrangement of society, and a system of inequality where men dominated women.

'Patriarchal ideologies and stigmatization': The Case of Mr. Patil

Mr. Patil joined as a Junior Accounts Officer in the Nagpur branch. He was promoted to the post of

Assistant Financial and Accounts Officer (AFAO) in Nagpur and then transferred from Nagpur to Delhi in the Institute. He said: "Clerks are appointed by the Institute according to the rules and regulations of recruitment and promotion in the Office is channelled by authorities as it is a Central Government job. Ambition might exist equally for men and women but the decision-making power to realize ambition belongs to men rather than women. There are both physical (natural) and social differences recognized by society between the two and both come to show different thought processes. In my personal life, however, decisions are taken jointly by both me and my wife".

Mr. Patil pointed out that there are domains within which men dominate and other areas where women are in the forefront, according to the nature of work. The gendered division of labour divides tasks between men and women according to their physical characteristics and social status. India is a male-dominated society. However, we have gender equality in the workplace, since it is a government office with proper rules and regulations. Here, there is a women's welfare cell that looks after cases of complaints registered by women and puts fear in the minds of men employees. Yet, despite legislation, this consideration for women is not observed with respect to society at large and within domestic walls. There is fear in the minds of men such that they do not want to jeopardize their employment but in domestic spaces, men think that they can do what they want to do with their wives because they cannot have their complaints redressed.

Mr. Patil came from Rajasthan and held that under Mughal rule in this province Hindu girls were kidnapped by the Mughals. He believed that this fact subsequently led to the killing of girls, female foeticide, and child marriages. In his view, this historical circumstance led to women feeling insecure in society and also resulted in their oppression by men. This oppression and subjugation was further accepted by women because they had limited choices which encouraged men in their behaviour towards women.

However, Mr. Patil's argument is a rationalization based on historical speculation about the Mughal rule.

'Progressive and regressive aspects of the lives of women': Ajay's Story

Ajay joined the Institute on a contractual basis. Over time, his job was made 'permanent' and he was appointed as Skilled Support Staff (SSS). His

next promotion was to the post of a Lower Divisional Clerk (LDC) and the work included diary despatch. He held that one has to reinvent oneself according to the needs of the work in order to make progress. He progressed because of his conduct and performance in the Office which enabled him to secure a permanent job even though he was not so well educated. He was satisfied with his work profile, interacted with his seniors, and was friendly with colleagues at the workplace. He had noticed that if you were not useful, then you were transferred. Some employees who were LDCs and Assistants did not work in a responsible manner. He reiterated that his seniors supported him a lot in learning new skills and especially his women colleagues. He mentioned the specific ones and showed his gratitude towards them. Among them, one was senior to him and the other had retired. This showed that at the workplace men and women provided assistance to each other in work matters.

Ajay was married and had two sons. He pointed out that genders were considerably more equal now which was not the case earlier though genders (male and female) cannot be equal in the sense that there are physical differences between the two. Now, equality was emphasized because of education, awareness, legislation, and various efforts at gender equality by the government, non-government organizations, media, and the quest for equality by women in the world via various women movements. However, in his view, the ideology of the older generation had not changed.

Ajay believed that India was still a male-dominated country and though we were progressing in many fields, the belief system was still based on the old customs of caste, religion, and gender. He said: "During my childhood, there was discrimination between the education of the 'girl' and the 'boy'. Education for girls was not encouraged. There were separate schools for boys and girls and now, there is co-education. For the younger generation, change is necessary, if they are to progress. The young generation is educated and believes in equality. But, still there are a lot of constraints on women. Women feel insecure in society and they are even considered weak by men. The cases of rape, male domination, and male egos, domestic violence, dowry deaths, and other cases of sexual harassment are all examples of women being vulnerable in our society and hence they are held back. Though they are not weak, it is this ideology that prevails in the minds of the people, and it includes even women. Thus, women also accept the prejudices structured by the patrilineal social order. Women work only with the permission of the

family. Otherwise, they do not work or in any case, if they go against the will of the family, then there are quarrels".

On the point of ambition, Ajay held that women are indeed progressing if they have become financially independent and can handle domestic activities and office work as well. Earlier, women were uneducated and dependent on men. When women worked in the fields they were considered to be a help but men were considered to be the breadwinners in the family. Men dominated the home and had decision-making power. However, in contemporary India, these practices have undergone a change because of education and women's willingness to strive for change. There are changes in styles of dress because of modernization and westernization which was fine as long as it was not vulgar.

In this narrative, women are progressing though they also feel insecure and demotivated by the acts of violence, constraints, and misconduct in society against them. From this account, however, one can see that there is a change in the mindset. Thus, one can conclude that just like there are two sides to a coin, both progressive and regressive views about women are apparent in society. But there are some instances of equality that highlight that there is a change in society with respect to views about gender.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of gender by scholars and the narratives recounted above reveal that there is a close connection between the culture of gender inequality at home and informal inequalities at work. Gender is practiced in society right from the birth of a child and it is then carried over to social institutions. It is through the socialization process during childhood and later that gender differences are nurtured and supported by informal practices. This allows gender discrimination to persist in silent and subtle forms at home and at work (Patel 2009). Gendering at work supports inequalities in the form of patriarchal continuity and oppression, or sexual harassment (Kaila 2005; Patel 2009; Fenstermaker et al 2002).

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