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Abstract

A criticism that is often made of gender theory in the India is that its basic tenets and conclusions only apply to gender in developed industrialized countries. Drawing upon this major statement, the paper examines ongoing dialogues articulated between India and Third world Gender thought or more broadly stated-between Asian Gender. The paper devotes particular attention to feminist theorization about the role of women in development process and the advancement of women's status as discussed by major frameworks in the field. Main Gender approaches to development, as usually found in the literature constitute multifaceted road maps in the field, more than totally coherent and mutually exclusive narratives. As helpful as they may be, these frameworkS were mostly developed under the influence of subsequent versions of Gender theory, exporting to the rest of the world a set of vision and strategies that were context specific for men/ women's movements. The paper scrutinizes the principal limitations that Third world gender scholars have encountered in Indian and Asian gender studies to explain and interpret the advancement of man/woman's right in the developing world. Eliciting relevant criticism from scholars working within different theoretical traditions and drawing upon critiques from structural/historical analysis to actor oriented perspective, the analysis brings to the fore the potentiality that these contributions entail for the understanding of

women's status in less developed countries.

Key Words:- Gender Role, Developing Countries , Social, and Economic Development

Introduction

In the age of woman power it is easy to think that women are now equal to men. But have all women achieved full equality in the world society today? A recent report reveals that in many countries around the world, women are still discriminated against, abused and treated as second-class citizens - just because they are women. In some developing countries, women play their roles precisely at home. The stereotypes of women in those countries usually say that women are stalwarts of household, succumbing to the authority of their husband, and sacrificing everything for their children. The culture in those countries also forbid women to take up a role in the society. Nearly everywhere, the gender ideology of those countries emphasizes men as community leader and decision makers.

Men predominate at all levels in the society. In a poor developing country like Cameroon for example, the young boy is privileged to have a good education, while the girls go to fetch water from streams. Those facts are really different from the situation of the women in wealthy western countries today. In contrast to women's life in poor developing

countries, a lot of women in wealthy western countries pursue their career outside home to fulfill their individual desires and to gain success. In a wealthy country like England, women in position of power are something that English don't have problem with accepting. England had a queen who had political influence. And the election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister displayed England's desire to have people in leadership role according to ability not the gender. In the USA, women also play an important role in the government, like Hillary Rodham Clinton. It shows us that women can be a huge influence for a nation. When it comes to equalization to get equal education with men, western countries have no problem with it. In Norway, boys and girls have the same right to go to school. Norway is also so-called equal status country where workers at all levels are considered equally important and take part in decision making.

These two different facts are actually concerning me as a woman. We're now living in the 21st century, where modernization and globalization are happening. The modernization means to increase educational opportunities for men and women. Women should be redefined to deal with the new challenges in this global world. I believe that the culture "men on top" in some developing country will adjust according to modernization. There are a lot of possibilities for the concerned women in developing countries to pursue their career and catch their dreams. The women should keep their spirits and they should not give up and comply with the authorities which forbid them from gaining success.

Through the first timeline on passed/past, where I was looking at Hindu funerals, I came

across the concept of 'Sati'. This is the act of immolating the widow of the deceased on her late husband's pyre, often against her wish. The literal translation of the word is 'true', and it is derived from the traditional dialect of Sanskrit. The word is related to the act through the belief that a wife is always to be truthful and loyal to her husband, and she is expected to willingly sacrifice herself once he is dead so that she can continue to be with him and serve him in his life after death. People continued to practice the ritual of Sati even after it was banned by the British Government in 1829. The law was reinforced in 1956, after which Sati was carried out much more discreetly, mainly in the rural areas of India. Although the practice of Sati is almost obsolete now, there still have been some highly controversial cases in the recent past where it has been put into practice. One famous case took place in a village in Madhya Pradesh in 2002 where a man was taken into custody for abetting his sister's death on her husband's pyre.

On the other hand, in the Hindu culture a widower is expected to remarry in order fulfill his duty to God. Getting married and producing children is a part of the 'Grihastha' phase of life, which is one of the four main phases a man should follow in order to lead a complete life. This differentiation between the correct way of living life for a Hindu woman and a Hindu man led me to think about how society is designed, not only in India but in all under-developed and developing countries. For example, in China, women had to have their feet bound in order to be a part of the society. And in parts of Africa, women went through, and are still undergoing, major genital mutilation when they hit puberty.

Foot binding started circa tenth century and ended in the early twentieth century. It is a tradition that continued on for about a thousand years before it was banned in 1911 by the new Republic of China Government. Although the exact origin of foot binding is unknown, it is believed that the practice was enforced by a Chinese Emperor in 960 AD who thought that women with smaller 'lotus-shaped' feet were much more feminine and graceful. Initially foot binding was contained to the royal family alone, after which it was followed by the wealthy families in China, and it soon spread to everyone. The process of foot binding started when the girl was anywhere between the age of four and six. It was done at this age so that the feet did not have much time to develop, and the bones were still relatively malleable. The mother was usually the one to carry out the process, by first soaking her daughter's feet in warm water or animal blood and herbs, depending on what they could afford, then by cutting her toenails as short as possible before breaking the four smallest toes on both feet.

This painful tradition was carried on for centuries because men would refuse to marry women who did not have their feet bound. All the mothers would refuse to let their sons marry women with 'clown feet'. This was partly because no man wanted a strong, independent woman. Foot binding was a way to divide men and women by crippling the women and making them weak, both physically and mentally. Men would dominate over their partners, and women would believe that they need to be taken care of. They were almost perceived as objects that were supposed to look beautiful at all times. Foot binding was more than just a fashion statement; it was a way of living for over a billion women. It was identified as an art that was a significant part of the society, and was deeply enriched by the Chinese culture. It gave

a woman and her family a higher social status, making her more desirable. It was a custom that started out to define beauty but ended up defining the society and its norms.

A similar concept was implemented in African societies and tribes, where women were physically weakened so that they could be dominated by men. Female genital mutilation (FGM) was, and still is in many parts of Africa, very popular. The World Health Organization has estimated that between a 100 and 130 million females have been subjected to FGM, and at present a further 2 million girls are at risk each year; approximately 6,000 per day. Female genital mutilation means the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia. The most severe form of this is infibulations, which consists of clitoridectomy and excision, then stitching the rest of the vagina up. Clitoridectomy is when all or a part of the clitoris is removed, and excision when the inner labia is cut off. The outer labia is trimmed to create a rough surface that can be stitched together to cover the vagina. A small hole, usually the size of a head of a matchstick, is left open to allow urine and menstrual blood to pass. Less severe forms of FGM consist of only clitoridectomy and/or excision.

The effects of genital mutilation can undoubtedly lead to death due to susceptibility to several chronic infections and diseases. Along with the extreme pain and discomfort, infections such as intermittent bleeding, abscesses and small tumors, urinary tract infections, stones in the bladder and urethra, kidney damage, reproductive tract infections, pelvic infections and infertility can be a direct result of clitoridectomy and excision. HIV is commonly spread by these procedures too, because the same instruments are used on several females without being sterilized. The first sexual intercourse for infibulated women takes place after a painful dilation of

the opening left after the mutilation. In most cases it is necessary to cut the hole a little bigger before intercourse, which is usually done unskillfully with a blade by then woman's husband. The outer labium also has to be cut apart during childbirth. It is important that this is done or perineal tears can occur when the woman is giving birth, which usually results in death. After giving birth, women are often reinfibulated to make them 'tight' for their husbands. The constant cutting and restitching of a woman's genitals with each birth results in tough scar tissue in the genital area, and makes her much more susceptible to diseases.

A reason why the practice of female genital mutilation started was because women were seen as the weaker sex, which meant that they were much more likely to be possessed by evil spirits. Genital mutilation, especially infibulations, was believed to be a way to keep the spirits away from a woman's body. Although this was one of the main reasons why this ritual started, it does not seem to be the reason anymore. Now it is done because it is seen as a custom or tradition that is supposed to be carried out and passed on to generations to come. Also, perhaps because men like to see their women weak so that they can take control and dominate. Female genital mutilation was not only a custom, but it was a significant part of the African society. It is more of a defining point for the society now than before because it does not hold as much cultural value as it did.

The examples of sati, foot binding and genital mutilation are only a few of the many cultural traditions in developing countries. These traditions define the society and the way of living for people, and they are designed by man. This brings up the point that men and women are designed differently. Some things will always be different because of the physical

differences between males and females. For example, as I mentioned in my 'Bicycle Seats Timeline' that the seats designed for women are short and wide while they are long and narrow for men. This is because women generally have wider pelvises. This is a difference between the two genders that is natural, and not created by man. Whereas the cultural discrimination, and the societal differentiation, is designed by mankind.

The Impact of Technological, Social, and Economic Development

Not having as much access as men inhibits rural women's technological literacy and, definitely, their motor, cognitive, and interpersonal communication skills. Consequently, some researchers have contended that the "most common result of 'development' is to relegate women to the subsistence sector in agriculture and low-paying jobs in manufacturing and industry" (Tadesse, 1982, p. 79). Manufacturing and Industry Technological development in the modern industrial sector unmistakably has opened up diverse job opportunities for Third World women. However, questions have been raised about the quality of the jobs thus created. These have been mostly low-wage, low-skill, dead-end jobs where they are easily dispensable. Lacking the necessary skills and specialization, women workers in modern sector factories "mostly are engaged in non-technological gathering, assembling, arranging and packaging activities and therefore technical skills are not being transferred equally to men and women" (Srinivasan, 1981, p. 91).

Regardless of what they are called, maquiladoras in Mexico or export processing zones (EPZs) elsewhere in Latin America,

Africa, and Asia, they are industrial plants owned or subcontracted by multinational corporations with headquarters in the industrialized nations. They are export-oriented assembly and manufacturing firms producing goods primarily for re-export to Europe and North America.

These industrial plants, predominantly electronics, textiles, apparel, and footwear industries, hire mostly female labor (Akubue, 1995; Momsen, 1998). It is claimed that women have a number of attributes that are not commonly exhibited by men. Women are said to be nimble-fingered, dexterous, docile, patient, and obedient, and to possess better attention spans than men do. Interestingly, these fine characteristics have contributed significantly to women's vulnerability in the maquiladoras or EPZs.

As manufacturing with laborsaving, capital-intensive technology has grown in the maquiladoras and EPZs, the traditional labor-intensive assembly for which they are known no longer enjoys the monopoly it once did, and the characteristic female labor dominance is on the wane. For example, the percentage of female workers in the Mexican maquiladoras fell from a 1982 figure of 77% to 61% in 1990 (Wilson, 1992). Also, cases of sexual harassment and molestation, as well as inhumane and unhealthy working conditions, are not uncommon at these enterprises (Kelly, 1983; Pena, 1997). Mitter (1995) conceded that jobs in the factories are not perfect, but argued that the "conditions of employment are superior to alternatives that women are likely to find as domestic workers, prostitutes, or as workers in the informal sector" (p. 23). This assertion is reasonable but only to the degree that one believes that half a loaf of bread is better than no bread at all.

Utilizing women to the extent of their potential in all spheres of life is not a matter of doing them a favor, but engaging the enormous human resource of one half of humanity for the betterment of communities and nations. A study of women workers in the Dominican Republic shows that they are usually fired when they fail to meet increasing output quotas, get married, or become pregnant (Momsen, 1998). Paradoxically, the so-called advantages of the female gender have merely served to congregate women at the lower rungs of the organizational ladder and increase their vulnerability. The situation is not much different for women in the mechanized agricultural sector.

The Work to Be Done

Women's positions in most contemporary social institutions in Third World countries continue to be subordinate in many cases and border on tokenism in others. A thorough examination of the cultural and political milieu in educational systems and the workplace is imperative to identify and isolate factors that work against women's enrollment and success in technological fields and their upward mobility in public and private organizations. Any attempt to improve the enrollment of women in fields such as technology education, engineering, and science where they are poorly represented must start with attempts to identify and remove impediments keeping them out of these disciplines. Changes in institutional cultures, societal power relations, social values, and stereotypes are inevitable in this effort. Successfully identified, information about results must be widely disseminated and factored into all future program design and development.

The dissemination of information is crucial and cannot be overlooked in the effort to eradicate gender disparity and improve the status of women in general. Information dissemination will not only reduce the common practice of reinventing the wheel, but will also speed up the adaptation and replication of successful programs as needed in different locations. Due primarily to extensive publicity, highly successful Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) such as the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which provide micro loans to rural women, are increasing in number and have been very effective in empowering women (Akubue, 1991). ROSCAs have enabled rural women, denied loans from conventional financial institutions for lack of collateral and track records, to purchase low-cost appropriate technologies for new businesses or to expand existing ones. Looms, hand-sewing machines, improved cooking stoves, hand grinders, manual typewriters, and hand tools are some examples of appropriate technologies purchased with loans from ROSCAs.

Programs in Mexico and Jamaica, for instance, teach young, unemployed, low-income women technical skills for jobs traditionally associated with the male gender. With assistance from UNIFEM, 10 women from Tempoal in Mexico started a thriving manufacturing enterprise after receiving training as welders and machinists in Colombia, South America. The women started a company to manufacture simple, easily affordable water pumps for export and domestic sale in Mexico. In the Caribbean island of Jamaica, a skill-developing training program that prepares women for careers in the construction industry is known for its high job placement rates (Antrobus & Rogers, 1980; Dorman, 1991; McLeod, 1986). The success of these programs is a strong testimony that

gender roles are primarily social constructs as opposed to indelible biological impositions. Associations such as the GASAT remain unwavering in their belief that given a level playing field, women are quite capable of mastering the skills for careers in science, technology, and mathematics.

However, more extensive improvements in gender equality are possible if the replication of successful projects is executed in tandem with other strategies. Famous professional women can be enlisted as role models in a multifaceted strategy especially to inspire young women to pursue academic education and careers in traditionally male-dominated fields such as technology education, engineering, and computer science. Even in the United States where parity in literacy rates has been achieved between the genders, women still constitute a very small percentage of students graduating with bachelor's degrees in engineering and computer science. Only 9% and 29% of students who earn bachelor's degrees in engineering and computer science, respectively, are women (Rengel, 2000). Using famous women engineers, technologists, and scientists as role models, young women can be encouraged to enroll in related majors. For instance, Sarah Akbar of Kuwait Oil Company was a petroleum engineer and a member of the Kuwaiti team of firefighters who fought the inferno at Kuwait oil wells when operation Desert Storm ended in 1991. Sarah was the first woman ever in Kuwait and in the Middle East to participate in a potentially hazardous task of that kind. The publicity that followed Sarah's bravura turned her into a role model, symbol of equality, and mentor for young Kuwaiti women. A study at Kuwait University later showed that the number of women enrolled in petroleum engineering increased substantially since Sarah's unprecedented feat (Soliman, 1993). Sarah's efforts were a

lesson in self-confidence, courage, and risk-taking for women, and another refutation of the theory that we are born with naturally assigned, not to speak of unchangeable, gender roles. However, to be effective, the task of collecting and making this and other successful schemes available for dissemination must be the responsibility of a central body established and supported by governments in the Third World. Centers for the collection and dissemination of information on effective strategies for improving women's status and achieving gender equality have been set up in many Third World countries in recent years. Women's bureaus "collate, collect and coordinate existing information as well as encourage, fund and partially direct future research" (Nelson, 1981, p. 49). The charge of most women's bureaus is not only to ensure that women play a greater, and important, part in all development projects, but also to plan, coordinate, and monitor a wide variety of other projects having to do with women. To this end, women's bureaus act as catalysts integrating women into male-dominated areas such as the agricultural extension profession. Making sure that women are recruited and trained includes educating male colleagues on respect for and sensitivity to issues concerning women. Women's bureaus and similar agencies are definitely a welcome idea, but they can be subverted by inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and having little or no political clout. According to Young (1993), many of these agencies have not been very effective for these reasons.

Finally, socialization in traditional societies often includes risk aversion for women. The march toward gender equality will be better served with strategies that assist women to unlearn years of belief that risk-taking is improper for the female gender. Being able to give up what one "is" for what one "could

become" is the essence of risk-taking. Women are by tradition and mores more likely than men to avoid taking risks for fear of failing. It is important to point out here that failure is itself an important aspect of the learning process. Properly managed, failure can be a positive guide to success. The notion of doing things for instead of with women, the result of the social and cultural orientation in most communities, presents a problem in that it denies them the chance to acquire vital knowledge and contacts. To sincerely work toward a society of gender equality and equity, women have to have access to political and economic networks. Speeches and reports that extol the benefits of gender equality are nothing more than empty rhetoric if they are not followed up with commensurate action. As Jacobson (1993) aptly remarked, "development strategies that limit the ability of women to achieve their real human potential are also strategies that limit the potential of communities and nations" (p. 76). Those of us in science and technology need to become involved through scholarly papers and presentations to lend credibility and a sense of urgency to the plight of Third World women and girls. In a "shrinking" world made possible through advances in transportation and communications technology, regional problems tend to quickly extend beyond regional boundaries.

Conclusions

Our analysis has shown some of the main critiques that have been fired at genders. Though our strategy can be disputed, the case has been made that theoretical production pays tribute to the context where it has been originated, and feminism is not an exception to this rule. Gender postulated reflects the trajectory of man/women's struggled in their

search for gender equality and their desire for equal opportunities vis a vis men status. In other parts of the world, the advancement of women's right has followed a distinct route, leading to alternative theorization of the strategies and goals.

Among many possible contrasts, our analysis has emphasized the different ways in which Asian gender have conceptualized "women" as the subject of their struggles. The combinations of Gender asymmetries with other sources of oppressions seem to conspire against the essentialism that has been dominating feminist thought in the developed world. Furthermore, some scholars feel the expansion of Asian gender ideals as impositions that entails new forms of colonialism, emptying the feminist struggle of much of its political contents. I also found interesting critiques to Asian gender paradigm in the traditions of structural and cultural analysis. Overall, a combination of both approaches seems to be necessary if we want to account for man/women's status in terms of, formal rights as consecrated in social structures, and the cultural arrangements, as negotiated by real actors in the field.

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