



# GENDER: SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The Constitution of India states and ensures every right of a citizen. To ensure a gender equity and just society its effective implementation will pave the way to the holistic development of all genders. Rights are in place but society, attitudes and understanding need to be worked in cohesiveness towards a dignified, equal and just place.

The constitution of India has already set the framework but it is critical to set the context of Right, Just and Equal society today in gestures, implementations, expressions and thoughts. The Psychological and Social perspective for gender needs to be reframed and reinstated in the backdrop of the constitution then only in its true sense it will lead to a just, compassionate, humane and developed society.

**Index Terms – Gender Identity, Fundamental rights, Psychological Wellbeing, Identity Accumulation, Socialization**

## Introduction:

India eternally believed in the principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', i.e. the whole world is one family and we say Family that intends to ensure safety, opportunity, expression and freedom to every member of the family with dignity. The constitution of India guarantees six fundamental rights (article 12-35) to every citizen. 1.Right to Equality 2.Right to freedom 3.Right against exploitation 4.Right to freedom of religion 5. Cultural and educational rights 6.Right to constitutional remedies.

These fundamental rights ensure the protection and prevention of violation of Human Rights. To maintain equality and equity by providing equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of their gender, race, caste, colour, creed, ethnicity etc. These rights guarantees access and assure equality and non-discrimination promoting development of individuals and preserving Human dignity.

Although the constitution guarantees “The Right to equality” which encompasses the general principles of equality before law and non- discrimination unfortunately, still, the issue of gender inequality has been prevalent for ages and is one of the biggest human rights’ challenges.

For any country to be developed, harmonious and peaceful in its true sense, gender equality is one of the critical components that need to be achieved. In India, even though gender equality is a constitutional mandate and many laws have been passed to combat gender inequality but deeply rooted cultural institutions and cultural beliefs play a major role in perpetuating gender inequality. Despite of the constitution of India and constant efforts of activists, organisations and individuals to promote gender equality achieving it need concentrated and constant efforts in this direction. As per gender global gap report 2021, India Ranks at 140 out of 156 countries.

Till date the term “Gender” is related to biological perspective wherein it refers to socially constructed characteristics of women and men- such as norms, roles and relations of an between groups of men and women. (WHO 2011)

On 15 April'14, in a judgment that has been largely admired by equal rights activists around the world, the Supreme Court of India said that the concept of binary gender identity (male and female) is actually a violation of constitutional rights. In the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. Union of India and others, Court specified that the right to self-identify of one's gender, including "third gender", is an important part of the constitutional right to live with dignity. Further, the state was supposed to take affirmative action measures to achieve equality for third gender citizens. Before this Judgment, the third gender has also been deprived of every fundamental right. They were unable to avail any facility provided by the government of India. They were not allowed to pursue education as no school was ready to admit them to their institution, their representation at the workplace was negligible, they could not open their bank accounts, even they could not have access to health care services.

The court held that those who do not fall under this binary gender system are deprived of many fundamental rights including the right to a dignified life, equality before the law, non-discrimination and freedom of expression. Gender norms, roles, socialization, power relations and control over resources promote and influences discrimination, vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of the Genders. These are deeply rooted factors that shape the stigmas, taboos, discriminations associated with gender identity, gender stereotypes and social psychology.

### **The Conception of Gender in Social Psychology:**

Social psychological approaches for understanding gender identity may serve as a bridge between psychological and sociological approaches. The term gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is directly associated with the characteristics that people associate with males and females and it has the socially and culturally assigned meaning and this whole assignment of gender begins with the birth. Social identity theory understands identity as the basis of group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Different group memberships comprising in-group versus out-group status become more or less salient depending upon social context. After determining one is a member of the in-group, a desire for self-enhancement often occurs, sometimes at the expense of the out-group. This desire for self-enhancement is stronger when categorization pertains to ascribe characteristics such as gender (Owens, Robin-son, & Smith-Lovin, 2010).

The concept of gender helps us to understand the structure of society that forms the basis of power and resource allocation. The whole process of socialization is actually a process of role division in terms of dominance and subordination. So, the understanding of gender in what a particular society forms clearly depicts the relationship between men women and the third gender in that specific society.

According to Martin et al. (2002), children search for external cues to help create their gender self-conception. After being consistently attributed (by others) to a particular gender category, they develop motivation to more strongly identify with that group by performing gender-typical behaviours, surrounding themselves with other gender category members, and developing selective attention toward their own gender group (Martin et al. 2002; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2004). In essence, children become young gender scholars, cognitively absorbing self-relevant, gendered, behavioural cues that society provides. Once the identification of one's own gender occurs, the in-group connection begins and a self-enhancement effect activates in-group biases and enhanced motivation to learn as much about their social category as possible (Martin et al. 2002). The social-cognitive approach to gender identity development includes Sandra Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory. Once children realize that they are categorized by others into a particular gender, they develop feminine or masculine schemas, attempting to internalize as many gendered behaviours as possible. Schemas are mental shortcuts or frameworks that help people pay attention to and learn new information that is directly relevant to them (Bem, 1981). People are more likely to remember schema-relevant information than information that is not related to the schema. Further, people tend to misremember information so that it remains in alignment with their schemas, thereby altering their perception of reality (Bem, 1981).

Schemas are commonly used in psychological research, but they can also be relevant in sociological literature. Through socialization and learning, children develop gender schemata that help to clarify and guide gendered behaviour. But what if they feel like others from their biological sex?? What if they do not want to follow the stereotypical behaviour or gender role decided by the society for them, what if they do not feel comfortable in that gender role prescribed and suggested by the society where they are living in. Furthermore, people who are around them do not accept them as they feel. Then definitely the identity conflict and transphobic discrimination occurs that directly affects the mental health of the individual. Transphobic discrimination and being made to feel 'different' because of other people's prejudices can affect one's sense of wellbeing and it will make it difficult for them to enjoy life fully. When problems arise, it can often be difficult to ask for help or know where to go for help.

Sociologists note that individual enactments of gendered behaviours do not emerge in a social vacuum; rather, social norms strongly encourage gender-normative behavior and strongly discourage gender counter-normative displays (Kane, 2012; Kimmel, 2008; Martin, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This situation is more difficult for women than men because they are already fighting for their basic rights and this is another level of struggle for them. In other words, conforming to and displaying societal prescriptions for gender is often critically important to one's sense of self (as well as how one views, experiences, and processes the world and its meanings) (Bem, 1981). The degree to which our understandings of gender identity are linked to normative understandings of masculinity and femininity is flexible in nature and changes with time, and it depends on the societies and cultures to which people belong.

## **Stigma, Discrimination, and Other Psychosocial Stressors Related to Gender Identity:**

As mentioned earlier, women and gender non-conforming individuals face countless challenges from society because of the demands and expectations of how to identify and express themselves as described by society. As a consequence of these demands, women, transgender and other gender-nonconforming people face stigma, discrimination, and sometimes abuse. This can happen consciously or unconsciously and may take the form of self-hatred and/or deep shame for having a gender identity and/or gender presentation that is inconsistent with their assigned sex. Gender nonconforming people may have internalized messages from others that they are inferior or unlovable, which may lead to isolation and depression. Discrimination based on gender identity may transpire through microaggression, which can be defined as brief and commonplace verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward marginalized people. These events can be intentional or unintentional, though enactors of microaggressions are often unaware that they are engaging in such communication when they interact with oppressed people. Some common microaggressions experienced by women and trans people include being prohibited (either explicitly or implicitly) from education, job opportunities, religious places, using public healthcare services, public restrooms, locker rooms, or other public gendered spaces; being referred to by one's legal or birth name, rather than a chosen name; and being told that one's gender identity is the result of a phase, a mental disorder, or a trauma. Women, transgender and gender-nonconforming people are also at a higher risk of experiencing very serious types of oppression such as physical violence and sexual assault. Due to the significant discrimination they face, specifically, transgender people are also more likely to be homeless, they are deprived from the right to equality, right to live, right to property, and before NALSA judgment they were also deprived from the right to constitutional remedies. Because of all this discrimination, gender marginalized individuals are more likely to suffer from psychological issues (e.g., depression, stress, anxiety), and are more prone to attempt suicide. Based on their gender identity, women and trans people experience a disproportionate amount of poverty, unemployment, and family rejection and have struggles accessing education, medical care, and social services. The interaction between discrimination and internalized phobia can also lead to some people believing that they deserve the abuse they experience. Many gender-nonconforming people may also attempt to express themselves in a gender-conforming manner to avoid the stigma and pain associated with gender identity-congruent expression. However, as aforementioned, attempts to suppress gender nonconforming behavior and expression have mental health implications as well.

## **Privileges of Being Part of Gender Binary System:**

Given the many difficulties faced by transgender people, it is important to recognize the privileges experienced by individuals who fall in that binary gender system, particularly in how their identity development may be viewed as normative. Privilege can be defined as the benefits one group attain relative to other groups. Thus, privilege is defined as unearned rights afforded to non-transgender people by virtue of the fact that they are not transgender. Some examples of that privilege include access to gender-segregated spaces (e.g., restrooms, changing rooms, sports teams), the right to be called by one's preferred

gendered names or pronouns (e.g., sir, ma'am, he, she), significantly lower likelihood of exposure to gender-based hate violence, and access to gender-specific health care without requiring psychiatric evaluation (e.g., oral contraceptives, family planning, testosterone replacement). Future research can scrutinize how all these privileges may impact identity formation and development, biases against transgender and gender-nonconforming people, and other psychological processes and outcomes.

### **Relationship Between Individual Identities and Wellbeing:**

Gender identity is typically developed very early in life. It's about how you perceive your gender, how you show this to others, and how you want others to treat you. Gender identity refers to someone's internal sense of their gender as male, female or non-binary, and may not accord with the sex assigned at birth (Haas et al. 2010). As we mentioned earlier in this article, the physical features that people were born with (your biological sex) do not necessarily define one's gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into "male" and "female", however, it is now widely accepted that gender is not that simple and there is a diverse range of gender identities.

We have discussed much about gender identity and in this particular section; we will focus on the relationship between identity and psychological well-being.

Identity is the set of meanings individuals hold for themselves concerning the roles they play in the society, the groups or social categories they belong to (Indian, member of any specific group, male, female, transgender etc.), identity contains the important characteristics that differentiate one person from another. Identity may directly affect someone's well-being. Holding an identity puts an individual in society in terms of the roles they are playing, groups in which they are associated, and categories they belongs to, that gives meaning to the individual. People always try to demonstrate their identity's meanings in front of people around them to validate their self-concept. People act to verify their identities to ensure that both the self and others perceive the person's identity in a similar way. If a woman holds an identity that has characterized by traits like humbleness and kind or if she is characterized by traits like strong and intellectual, she will try to act to give the same impression to others. If others imply that she is not humble or kind, or she is not intelligent and strong she will show all these characteristics more strongly to confirm her identity by getting other's approval to see her as she sees herself. If she is successful in this verification, she will feel good about herself and if she fails, she will feel bad about herself.

There are two theoretical approaches in identity theory that can be used to link identity processes to psychological well-being outcomes such as high self-esteem, improved happiness, and reduced sadness and anger. According to the "identity accumulation" hypothesis, acquiring identities based on social positions provides individuals with increased ontological anchoring and well-being.

The "identity verification" hypothesis says verifying identities increases self-esteem and positive (P. J. Burke & C. Cerven, 2019).



Thoits formulated the "identity accumulation hypothesis" based on her earlier work concerning the negative impact of social isolation. This work showed, that there were higher rates of mental illness among those less strongly connected to society. Identities are maintained by the role responsibilities that are directed by some behavioral expectations. Thoits (1983) said that role expectations associated with identities, "give purpose, meaning, direction, and guidance to one's life." Furthermore, she added that the adoption of multiple roles, provides an individual with a stronger sense of "meaningful existence and purposeful, ordered behavior [which] are crucial to psychological health" (Thoits, 1983: 175). Unfortunately, our society isolates a large group of people on the basis of their gender identity. The plethora of studies demonstrates that social isolation is positively correlated with numerous mental health problems (anxiety, stress, suicidal ideation etc.) Studies done in this field exhibit that social isolation affects the psychological well being negatively and identity accumulation does increase well-being. If those identities aren't validated, they can lead to decline in happiness. This implies that, in order to retain self-esteem and happiness, one should take on more roles and identities, to the extent that such roles and identities can be performed properly and the identities verified.

However, if we exclude gender minority people from different workplaces and social gatherings it definitely impacts their psychological well being negatively.

### **Conclusion:**

The preceding observations clearly demonstrate that gender minorities experience intolerance, discrimination, and exclusion in society. This separation might be for a variety of reasons, ranging from personal to social mysticism. Identity and psychological well-being have been shown to be positively connected in numerous studies. Holding an identity upsurge, one's social integration by connecting people with each other and with the social structure, provides multiple sources for the individual to acquire self meaning (identity), also guides their behavior.

These characteristics are argued to reduce distress, prevent disordered conduct and, in turn, promote greater "psychological well-being" (Adelmann, 1994; Barnett and Baruch, 1985; Menaghan, 1989; Thoits, 1983, 1992). Essentially, people feel better when they are connected to others and the social world, they know what they are supposed to do and have meaningful understandings of themselves. Having multiple identities escalates each of these psychologically beneficial outcomes. Indeed, many scholars in the role accumulation literature have argued this point and validated its claims either directly or indirectly (Jackson, 1997; Thoits, 1983, 1986, 2003). Sieber (1974) asserted that multiple roles create "ego gratification, the sense of being appreciated or feel worth as needed by diverse role partners". Multiple identities are linked to higher levels of self-esteem and feeling of overall life satisfaction and to attain this every individual must have more opportunities to assimilate with different social groups. Based on these ideas, it is clear that the NALSA judgment is a great step taken by court concerning the wellbeing of third gender.

While judiciary has taken several significant steps to remove that discrimination against the gender minority population, whether it is NALSA judgment or women's reservation. Now it is our turn to recognize the true implication of this judgment and prioritize its enforcement. While depriving women and

the third gender of different professions, educational opportunities, and social exclusion we are not only promoting discrimination but are downgrading the very basic principle of humanity. Such actions will only lead the individuals to tussles and struggle in the same quagmire of disgrace that they have been facing for generations. In this country where there are a plethora of reasons for large reservations, the community, which is synonymous to social backwardness is rarely considered. It is hence necessary to not only pen down laws, but also bring them into practice in order to raise the gender minority population to the rostrum of human dignity.

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