

Q) Answer in brief on gender and politics.

Ans: The term gender refers to cultural ideas that construct images and expectations of both females and males. In social sciences and literary criticism, it is used to indicate the differences in social status of man and woman, particularly to refer to the fact that women are placed in a lower status in relation to their intrinsic worth. Feminist thought focuses on gender perspective that calls for cultural transformation of society. It implies the right ordering of status of women in relation to men in social and political life. The terms 'political', 'politics' and 'politician' are derived from the Greek word 'polis' which stood for ancient Greek city-state. But at present a distinction is drawn between public and private sphere of human life. The usage of the term 'politics' is confined to the institutions and activities falling in the public domain. Politics comprises both political science and political theory. The origin of the discipline of politics are commonly located with Aristotle's 'The Politics'. Since this time, there has been deep-rooted disagreement as to what constitutes the political. As a result, we find several definitions of the political such as in terms of governmental institutions, relations of power etc. The broad conception of the political has created the disciplinary space for considering issues of gender as central to the study of politics. The more extensive power-based conception of the political both emerges from and makes possible, the feminist challenge to the orthodoxy of politics. This orthodoxy is reflected in the dominance of masculinity in politics.

Until recently, political science has been a male dominated discipline even in Western industrialized nations. Gender and politics in the field of political science has been a struggle supported by and dependent upon women's movements in the last part of the twentieth century. But since politics is a real world phenomenon and political science as an academic discipline are gendered. The study of politics has now broadened beyond the narrow focus on those holding formal offices and the politics of distribution. It now includes many more issues and ideas about masculinity and femininity etc.

Before the emergence of feminist theory as a recognised academic perspective, contemporary political theory was largely assumed to be gender neutral in focus. But the issues of gender are clearly central to any understanding of the policy. The practice and study of politics are based on masculinity. Brown says, 'politics has been more exclusively limited to men and more self-consciously masculine than any other social practice'. By and large, women have been excluded from traditional political activity and discouraged from defining their activities as political. The issues of gender were considered to be irrelevant to the political. Feminist always claim that politics has consistently excluded women. They also claim that feminism is explicitly political. Anne Philips says, feminism, 'is politics'.

During the last two decades, gender issues were penetrating into the political reality, influencing practice, theory and global consequences. Great pressures have been present, which neither society nor politics could ignore. The concept of gender has nowadays reached an admirable position as it has found place of importance in political agendas. A great progress politically has been made, but many things still remain to be done.

The field of gender and politics has intellectual roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century Western liberal, socialist and Marxist thought. Its emergence as a field of study and policy making has been strengthened by changes in the global capitalist economy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly at the beginning of the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the field of gender and politics, like the global economy, is undergoing major changes associated with globalization. Globalization has brought more women from different parts of the globe together and generated several transnational women's networks and organizations

that generate and transmit knowledge about gender and politics. In 1976, the International Political Science Association, the IPSA Research Committee on 'Sex Roles and Politics' was first created as a study group. A Permanent Research Committee was created in 1979 which addresses several issues like participation of women in politics, public policy, third world countries, empowerment of women etc. In 2000, a new Research Committee on Gender, Globalization and Democratization was created to new realities of globalization and its gendered consequences.

Thus, gender issues also form an important part of politics. The emergence of feminist theories have helped on focussing the role of the state in addressing gender related problems. Gender perspective in political theory tries to create space for more heterogeneous gendered perspectives within political theory.

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