



SOCIOLOGUE

आओ, बात करें

A NEWSLETTER BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
MAITREYI COLLEGE

FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

"The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden."

- Pierre Bourdieu

Dear Reader,

When we began writing this editorial, the first thing that came to our mind was to identify that which would make our perspective different. We found the answer in our discipline- Sociology, which for the past few semesters has completely altered our lives. It taught us that one needs to question commonsense and go beyond the apparent. During our two years in college, we realized that Sociology is not merely a discipline, rather, it is way of life - a lens through which we can see the world around us and make sense of it. We further realized, if that is the case then we need to take Sociology beyond the classrooms and create a platform for dialogue.

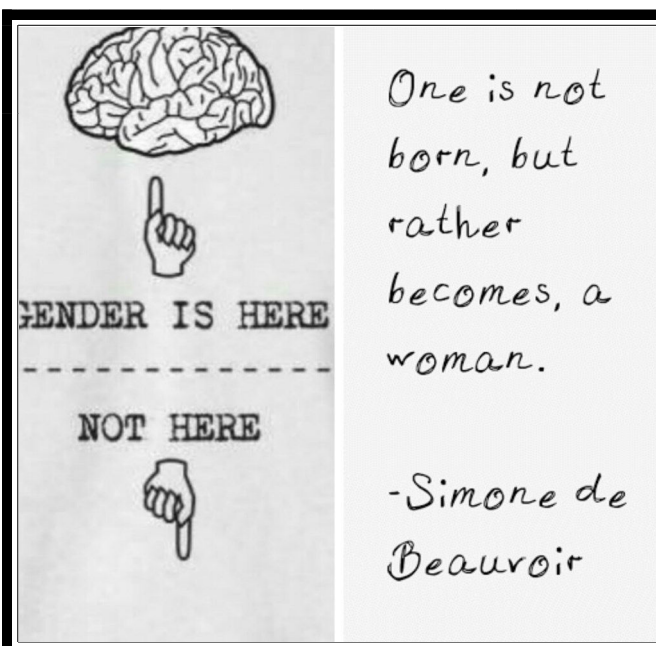
Our newsletter aims to reach out to a wide audience, from various fields and disciplines. Our objective is to start a dialogue which can address varied issues of everyday life, particularly those which escape our attention because they seem banal, mundane and thus, insignificant. Internalisation of Sociology, one might say, is our prime motive. Thus, Sociologue puts together a platform, for interaction, discussion, deliberation and eventually, change, however slight it may be.

The running theme for this year is Gender Matters.

It is interesting that not only do we find gender everywhere, but we also take part in doing it. Yet we never give it a serious thought, even though it is the primary basis of how we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others. We experience what it means to be a woman every day, in the responses we get on our dressing, talking and behaving; in our understanding of 'good' and 'bad', 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate'. For instance, it is not appropriate for a girl to be aggressive and loud or to stay out late, it is not appropriate for boys to cry etc. We brush these aside, assuming that these experiences are an inevitable consequence of our being male or female. We don't question these differentiations because we believe that our 'bodies' are extensions of our 'selves'. Each is seen as the extension of the other viz., a person with the body of a female

is described as a woman and is expected to be feminine, and a person with a male body is described as a man and is expected to be masculine. In other words, the terms female and woman, male and man are used interchangeably, and feminine and masculine are seen as their natural attributes. What we need to be aware of is that the terms 'man', 'woman', 'masculine' and 'feminine' come as an entire package.

There is a need for clarity on these words. The term 'female' refers to our biological sex and the term 'woman' refers to our social self, our gender. We are born with a sex but we learn to be a woman/man as we are brought up. We are taught gender appropriate behavior through the process of socialization. So girls are taught to take interest in household



chores etc. and boys are taught to be assertive etc. While explanation of sex emerges from one's reproductive organs, gender is a combination of distinctive socially approved attitudes, roles and expectations associated with each sex. It varies from society to society. Consequently, notions of feminine and masculine also vary among cultures and through history. The term gender is used to point to socio-culturally adapted traits while sex refers to biological characteristics.

So one can say that our sex can be seen as an ascribed status while gender is achieved. Thus, a person may identify with the gender assigned at birth or may identify differently. But what usually happens is that one does not have a choice. Rather, they find themselves in

an already designated box. Although, we may, at times, question various issues associated with this status but we rarely interrogate it. Almost never do we realize that everything that we come across in our lives is seen through a lens which is gendered.

Thus, the words 'born' and 'being' have different meanings. But in our society, if you're born with a particular set of genitalia you are automatically expected to fill the shoes as a man or a woman. So the important question is 'What makes a man, a man and what makes a woman, a woman?'. All of us need to give this question a serious thought, only then is some change possible. There is much more than what meets the eye and our attempt is to unravel what is beneath the surface. Since, gender is not only a part of our world but also a lens through which we see, understand and construct the world around us. Hence, the theme 'Gender Matters'.

We hope to initiate a dialogue - or may we say, Sociologue - on various aspects of Gender. We realise that four sides of an A-3 size paper may not be enough and so, we're going to take the help of seminars, workshops, poster campaigns, movie screenings, panel discussions, so on and so forth. In due course of time, we also wish to make our newsletter bilingual (Hindi and English) to make sure that language is not a hindrance to our dialogue. For this, we welcome contributions from our readers.

The idea is to bring about a change, however slight, in how people approach Gender, to bring it down to what it actually is - a social construction. What could be a better place to start this than a college campus? And even if one person begins questioning the given, we will feel that we have succeeded in what we set out to do. We look forward to hearing from you.

Take a step back, think and start being, because you are born only once but you 'become' everyday. So...

आओ, बात करें

-Nikhita Singh & Tanya Chakraborty
(Third year)

There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. Might as well speak of a female liver.
-Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Gender: Being or becoming?

In the month of October this year, we stumbled upon a news item in the Delhi edition of Indian Express- Delhi High Court, following Supreme Court's league in recognizing the 'third gender' directed the Delhi police to escort a 19 year old transgender named Shivya who was "forcibly" deprived of his identity and travel documents by his family, to Delhi Airport so that he could return to the US. It came in the wake of the case filed against Shivya's parents who enrolled him in a college in Agra to "Learn to act like a proper girl" (I.E., October 6, 2015).

We asked ourselves, why did this happen? A little thinking made us realize that most of us assume that there are only two genders - men and women. When we look around we tend to identify people as either men or as women, and the moment we cannot classify someone in this binary, we start getting uneasy. We get uneasy because we don't know how to behave with them since there is no pre-set category within which to place them. While growing up we learnt gender appropriate behaviour with regard to men and women only but we were at a loss when we came across a person who could not be fitted into either. This unraveled an important dimension of 'gender' which is, that it is a social construct. The person in the case mentioned above was being trained to be girl although had clear inclinations towards imbibing characteristics that make a boy. However, his parents decided they wanted him to be a girl because she had a female body. This clearly points to the prevalent common sense understanding in which a person with a female body has to be trained to be a woman.

Consequently, one can say that neither sex nor gender has the option of either orientation or choice. The heterosexual norms of society fail to provide appropriate space for the existence of categories in addition to those of masculine and feminine. Thus, terms like third (fourth, fifth) gender, agender, polygender, pangender transgender, gender queer, gender-bender, transsexual, intersexual, and bigender are still not recognised. Though the term 'third gender' is increasingly gaining recognition but it is still associated with abnormality.

At this point the distinction between sex and gender is relevant. In ordinary parlance, *sex* and *gender* are seen as synonymous as evident in the aforementioned case. However, they are not. Sex refers to biological differences; chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs and Gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine. The reason why only these two genders have been considered as a natural order of things is be-

fore, a 'man' = male sex+ masculine social role and a 'woman' = female sex + feminine social role.

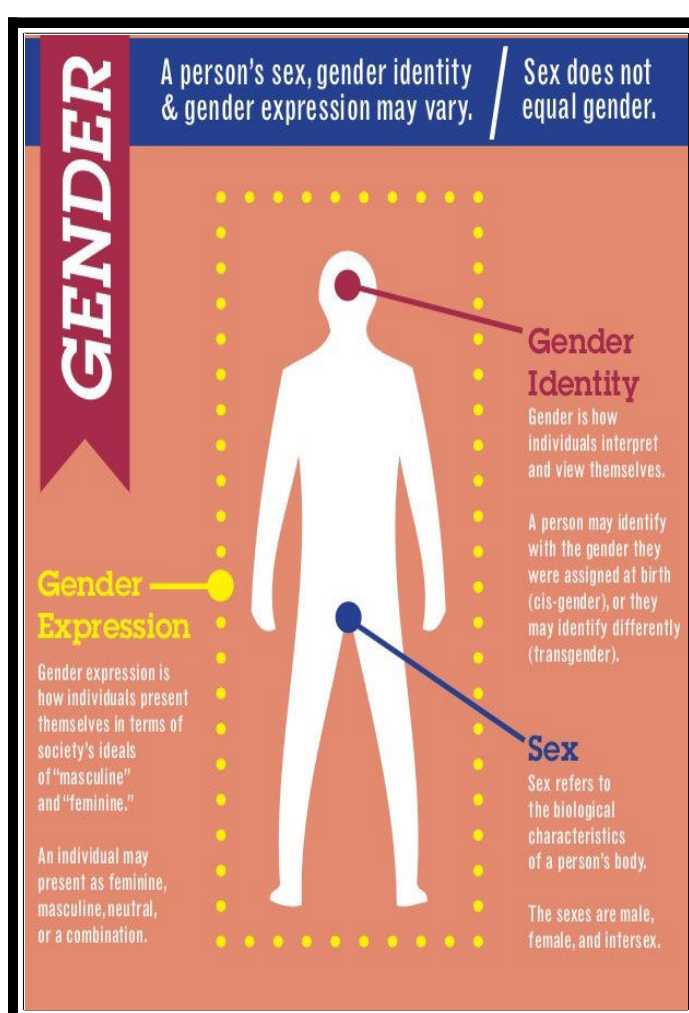
Gender is one of the most fluid concepts as it varies inexplicably among cultures and throughout history. The only thing fixed about this evolving term is that it is performed. It is not something one is but is something one does and in the process becomes. An individual who is sexed as a female and gendered as a man is considered an abnormality. This raises the question, how does one "do" gender and is there a right way of doing it? If being a female, which is my sex, I choose to be a boy then on what basis shall I decide my gender? Am I a man or a woman? If gender is what we do then what are the "things" that would make me feel like a boy and more importantly get recognized as a boy? For, social recognition as a boy is crucial for my identity as a boy.

Of relevance here is Judith Butler's book ***Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity***. She argues that sexed bodies cannot signify without gender, and the apparent existence of sex prior to discourse and cultural imposition is merely an effect of the functioning of gender. That is, both sex and gender are constructed. The central idea of *Gender Trouble* is that gender is performative. It is not Nature which decides where the category of 'male' ends and the category of 'intersex' begin, or where the category of 'intersex' ends and the category of 'female' begin. Humans decide.

Today, the emergence of multiple gender identities challenge the societal norms that we inherited, enforcing the idea that gender is a social construct and that it is constructed through our constant performance of it. If a society accepts the existence of multiple genders, it would be a liberating step. This we believe will create a truly democratic society.

In conclusion, we would like to state that gender issues are not simply side issues. Rather, they are embedded in all that we believe and practice. Acknowledging this is a first step!

- **Garima Mukherjee & Tanisha Garg**
(Second year & First year)



cause our society never intentionally conditions an individual to become anything other than a man or a woman. Any other identity seen in persons is because they chose to defy the societal norms. As per society's norms, a male is usually someone who is muscular, strong and rebellious while a female is someone who is meek, delicate and obedient and corresponding roles such as man as a protector is portrayed in the role of a father, brother or husband while the women as a care-giver, nurturer is showcased in the role of a mother, wife or daughter. The society tags them as a man or a woman, but whether it is truly a man or a woman or anything other than the two depends on how close their behavior is to the behavior the society expects of them. To put it simply, a person isn't born in a gender, it becomes a gender. There-

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The message is clear. Boys are the norm, girls the variation; boys are central, girls peripheral; boys are individuals, girls types. Boys define the group, its story and its code of values. Girls exist only in relation to boys.

- Katha Politt

All that is making news right now

Kolkata Welcomes Country's First Transgender Durga Idol. Breaks All Stereotypes

Gender balance is a tight rope for most organisations: JP Morgan's Kalpana Morparia

'I'm a living doll': Meet the new 'Human Barbie', a 26-year-old Russian whose parents choose her clothes, refuse to let her date or go out alone

Gender-Neutral Title 'Mx' Added to Oxford English Dictionary

India's First Ad With a Lesbian Couple Goes Viral

Transgender to guard school buses in Punjab, Haryana

"Matribhumi" No More: What An Attack On An All-Woman Train In Bengal Reveals About The State's Continuing Problems

Vatican Says Transgender People Cannot Be Godparents

Transgenderers seek quota, jobs, homes and toilets through various schemes like Kinnar Awaas Yojana, Tritiyapnthi Shouchalaya Yojana, Kinnar Udyoggraha Yojana and many more.

West Bengal govt plans to enroll transgenders in civic police volunteer force

College in Bengal to have country's first transgender principal

Manabi Bandopadhyay will take charge of Krishnanagar Women's college next month.

The story of Dhee: Bangladesh gets its first ever lesbian comic strip

Pinjra Tod: Student campaign exhorts women to oppose 'sexist' hostel rules

Baghpat and caste & gender discrimination in India

Woman centric initiatives at India Inc. not achieving desired goal: Catalyst

Department Updates

- The Department of Sociology welcomed the freshers on the 18th of August 2015 with a 'Back to School' themed party.
- On the 25th of August, 2015 a seminar on 'Ba' and Education was conducted by Prof. Atsushi Takei
- A Lecture titled 'Amidst Violence: Politics, Memory and New Possibilities for Sociology' was delivered on 28th of August 2015 by Prof. Sasanka Perera, the Founding Chairman and Professor in the Department of Sociology and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences of South Asian University (SAU).
- The Department of Sociology in collaboration with the Department of History hosted a seminar on the 8th of September 2015 on the theme 'Do Monuments Speak: Past in Present or Present in Past?' by the renowned historian, academician and documentary filmmaker Mr. Sohail Hashmi.
- Movie screening and movie reviewing was held on 29th September 2015. The movie chosen was 'Mona Lisa Smile' which focused on the theme of social construction of gender.
- On 6th October 2015, the Department of Sociology and Department of History jointly organized a talk by Dr. Nandini Sinha Kapur on 'State formation in Mewar'.
- Throughout the semester, Sociology Association created awareness in college premises about gender and its presence in every sphere of life, using posters as their main medium.

Upcoming Events

- Fieldwork to Udaipur from 20th October to 24th October 2015 on the theme, 'Do Monuments Speak: Past in Present or Present in Past?' Talk on 'Why Gender? Need for Feminist Thinking' by Prof. Rajni Palriwala, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics on the 27th of October, 2015.
- Launch of the department newsletter, **Sociologue: Aao Baat Karein** on the 27th of October, 2015.

Yours Sociologically:

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We Recommend

MUST WATCH

1. Arth - Mahesh Bhatt
2. Prem Rog - Raj Kapoor
3. Water - Deepa Mehta
4. Dor - Nagesh Kukunoor
5. The World Before Her - Nisha Pahuja
6. Mona Lisa Smile - Mike Newell
7. Modern Family

MUST READ

1. Anna Karenina - Leo Tolstoy
2. The Second Sex - Simone De Beauvoir
3. The Bell Jar - Sylvia Plath
4. Interpreter of Maladies - Jhumpa Lahiri
5. Rewriting Ramayana - Noboneeta Deb Sen
6. Palace of Illusions - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
7. Seeing Like a Feminist - Nivedita Menon
8. Ms. Militancy - Meena Kandasamy

A Genderless Soul

I woke up next to a long raven haired human in a sunlit room. Another one came rushing in with a blanket, much larger but with sparser hair. After contemplation, I realized I was born today.

A similar looking creature lies beside me. We know each other very well, for we spent nine months together in a womb counting minutes.

In time, I was told to refer to it as my brother. I was also told we designate the people of my brother's kind as "he" and my kind as "she". The world was unfolding itself to be an interesting place.

I was coached to be a passive individual and grew up understanding the power of my tears. I was encouraged to cry; to "let it out" over discordant matters. However, my brother was splashed with cold water and reprimanded whenever his emotions got the better of him.

I was dressed up a far cry from my brother. Now, do you remember I called him a 'similar creature'? Today, we are poles apart, in terms of attires, looks and preferential treatment; ignorant of each other's emotional state.

There were times when we would often stealthily trade our clothes. Once he told me that he wished to have long hair like mine, but we dare not ask our father. Such questions fetched us a decent beating on our buttocks.

One fine night, I was sent off to an entirely unfamiliar household to live with a stranger for whatever is left of my life. My mother demanded me to love this man for he was "generous enough to have married me". I was offended and outraged but couldn't do anything. Because "girls do not bellow but compromise."

Today my son was performing on the school stage, dressed in a white apron playing a fairy godmother. He smiled when his teachers told him he makes a pretty girl. No, he is not offended. My child feels immensely, loves deeply and allows himself to cry when it hurts. My child is the way he is, not because I failed to raise him up like a son, but because he knows that our souls are genderless.

My husband told our son, when he was lost between wanting to be a boy or a girl, he chose both. Bewildered, my son looked at me and so I told him that men do not have to put on a brave face or inflict pain on someone to prove their virility. A man could be tough as a rock and fragile as a rose. However, he is expected to be a good human being. Distinction can and will be made all through our life, from toilets to clothes. After all, our soulless bodies will be put to rest someday. Buried in the same soil.

- Deyir Nalo (Second Year)