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GENDER STUDY AS A NEW BRANCH OR ASPECT OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Although Social Philosophy, i.e., the Philosophy of Social Relations and Institutions, has been studying Man and Woman as the two basic pillars of the human family and of the human society, in general, and also the structure and function of the inter-relationship between Man and Woman, especially within the family set-up, almost from times immemorial both in the East and in the West, a separate and specialised philosophical study of the gender-aspect in the familial and in the social relationship at large, has not yet been undertaken, at least not in a systematic and sustained manner, by social philosophers in general. Although the basic philosophical concepts and principles for the gender study in society, especially for the study of women, as distinct from men, were enunciated at the dawn of history by philosophers like Plato, Vaśiṣṭha, Gautama, Manu, the Buddha and Jesus-though differently by each one of them - subsequently, in course of time, in the socio-philosophical traditions of the different religions of the world, man and woman have been considered mainly as together constituting the organic unity of the family and of the society in general, with man invariably occupying the major and leading role, both in the family and in the society at large. But now, with the coming of the age of democracy in the world in general, with the consequent awareness of the rights and liberties of women as separate individual persons in themselves and for themselves, apart from their being integral members of their families and other social organisations and institutions, and with the emergence and the gaining in strength of the international movement of Feminism, a definite need has now arisen for the development of gender study, especially of the study of female gender or woman, as a new and important branch or aspect of social philosophy. Although feminism is basically a philosophy of social life and although the basic concepts and principles governing man-woman relationships in family and in society were laid down by different religio-social philosophers, seers, saints and prophets in the different religious

societies of the world, and although secular social philosophers like Plato, Karl Marx and Engels, Bertrand Russell, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir have been, in their own different ways, champions of the rights of women and of feminism, still social philosophers in general have not paid sufficient attention to the study of gender and to its socio-philosophical implications in a great majority of their works. Social philosophers, as distinguished from sociologists, have discussed mostly the philosophy of family, of education and of other social institutions, and have, in general, not discussed the philosophy of manhood or womanhood as such, nor have most of them discussed even the philosophy of marriage, as distinguished from the philosophy of family and of marriage as an integral element of it.

A discussion of the philosophy of manhood and of womanhood has now become both socially and academically imperative in view of the recent knowledge which we have obtained, both with regard to manhood and with regard to womanhood through the findings of biological, anthropological, psychological and sociological sciences. As sciences like social psychology and sociology have now brought out, and as the feminists today rightly emphasise, while 'sex' is a biological differentium, 'gender' is essentially a social differentium. Gender and all that accompanies gender-differentiation happen to be almost universally the products of the traditional social philosophies of the different religions and sects of the world. But we should note here that in forming and establishing the religio-social and socio-philosophical outlook and attitudes towards the man-woman relationship, both within the family and outside of it in the society in general, it is the subsequent, orthodox and male-centric religio-social traditions that have played the major-role and that have led to the unjust and discriminatory treatment of women in the civilised(?) societies of the world, rather than the original socio-philosophical teachings and preachings of the originators and the early developers of the different religions of the world. This is true (at least so is my view) of the socio-philosophical traditions of all the major religions of the world. This point can be easily illustrated and proved just by comparing the actual pronouncements of the great originators, seers and prophets of the different religions, like the Vedic and Upaniṣadic seers and Ṛṣis, the Buddha, Jesus and Prophet Mahammed, on the man-woman relationship and on the position and role of women in the family and

in the society in general with the subsequent, more rigorously orthodox and male-chauvinistic restrictions put on women both inside the family and outside of it. To illustrate this point a little more specifically in the context of the Hindu religio-social or socio-philosophical tradition we can see that in the Hindu religio-social tradition it is the more rigidly orthodox and more male-oriented religious texts like the Manu-Smṛti, Āngirasa-Smṛti, Harita-Smṛti, Viṣṇu-Smṛti and the Shankha-Smṛti which have come to be regarded as more authoritative and religiously more binding than either the teachings of the early Vedic and Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis or the teachings in the more liberal, more humane, less orthodox and less male-oriented Dharma-Shāstra texts, like the Vashistha Dharmasūtra, the Gautama-Dharmasūtra, the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra and the Yājñavalkya-smṛti. All this is clearly the handiwork of the male-chauvinistic social and economic philosophy of patriarchy, the socio-psychological roots of which lie in the jealousy of the male and in the desire of the male to rule over and to dictate to the female. This is well brought out by the works of such comparative sociologists of marriage, consanguinity, family and property, as L.H. Morgan, Bachofen, J.F. McLennan, H.H. Buncroft and Giraud-Teulon. In the Hindu, male-oriented, orthodox religio-social tradition, for example, male-jealousy and male-chauvinism led to such extreme anti-female institutions and practices as the sati system and the practice of tonsuring the head of a widow and disfiguring her, although neither of these systems or practices has the sanction of any of the principal Dharmashāstra writers, including Manu. I am afraid that more or less similar even of to a less extreme extent) jealousy-ridden, male-chauvinistic, anti-female socio-philosophical orthodox religious traditions and practices may have been established in the other religious socio-philosophical traditions of the world as well. The way to eradicate, or at least to slacken, the rigours of such anti-female social rules and practices in the socio-philosophical traditions of the different religions of the world lies, according to me, in going back to the direct teachings and preachings of the great originators of the principal religions of the world, the Divine Incarnations or Personages, the Seers or the Ṛṣis and the Prophets, i.e., to the direct teachings and practices of personalities like the Vedic and Upaniṣadic Seers or Ṛṣis, the Buddha, Jesus and Prophet Mohammed. For these divine and great personalities were far above the general human frailties and vices, like male-

jealousy, male-chauvinism etc, and almost invariably adopted a highly liberal and humane attitude towards women and other weaker or weakened persons in society. In order to achieve the above objectives conceptually or philosophically, a separate branch, devoted specifically to the study of gender and its socio-philosophical implications, should, according to me, be developed within the general subject of social philosophy, particularly in relation to the socio-philosophical studies of marriage and family. The development of such a new branch, or at least a new aspect of social philosophy is, I think, very much the need of our times on this threshold of the 21st century.