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GENDER ANALYSIS THROUGH THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

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Abstract

Society is a complex network of human relationships, and gender relationships are an integral part of this social structure. Various theoretical perspectives have been developed to study human relationships within this context. This article has focused on exploring gender relationships using sociological theories. To achieve this goal, qualitative data have been collected using content analysis as part of a qualitative research design. The data have then analyzed and linked to the concept of gender through thematic categories based on sociological theoretical explanations. After analysis of theoretical assumptions as the data, it has been concluded that gender relationships manifest in diverse forms, revealing variations when it has been viewed through theoretical perspectives of sociology.

Keywords: Gender, Sex, Sociological Theoretical Perspective, Socio-Cultural System

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Introduction

In the natural world, every living organism is categorized into sex to ensure the perpetuation of their species and lineage. As part of the animal kingdom, humans are similarly classified into sex based on their physical characteristics, distinguishing them as women, men, or as belonging to a third sex. When it comes to sex, most individuals are classified as either women or men based on their physical characteristics, with a smaller percentage identified as belonging to a third gender. As a result, people take on distinct roles and responsibilities based on whether they have female or male physical attributes, due to the process of creation. Individuals with female physical attributes naturally have the biological responsibilities of carrying a child in the womb, giving birth, breastfeeding, and nurturing, among other duties. As a result, the anatomical structure of females is more complex and diverse compared to males. In addition to the primary female reproductive organ, the vagina, the female anatomy includes structures such as the uterus for gestation, breasts for lactation, and other relevant organs. These organs' varying sizes and functions have been shaped by nature to accommodate the distinct processes of physical growth, development, conception, and reproduction. It is primarily a fundamental natural duty of reproduction that distinguishes the appearance of a female body from that of a male. Since males do not have a uterus for reproduction, they do not undergo menstruation, discharge, or experience abdominal expansion due to pregnancy. In addition, they are not involved in breastfeeding, so their breasts do not develop. It appears that nature has tasked males with the responsibility of providing sperm from their reproductive organs to fertilize the female's uterus for reproduction. Sex refers to the different physical structures and biological functions determined by nature. According to Farley (1999), males and females can be distinguished from the moment of conception due to differences in their chromosomes and hormones, which lead to variations in their physical development.

In this context, according to Henslin (1997), when we talk about females and males, we are primarily referring to the reproductive organs - the vagina and penis - related to reproduction. Additionally, he has discussed secondary sex characteristics, which represent physical differences that do not directly affect reproduction, and he labels them as secondary gender traits that develop in adulthood. Similarly, Bilton et al. (1996) suggested that sex refers to the inherent physical differences between females and males, including chromosomes, genitals, and reproductive characteristics. Sex is considered a natural marker that distinguishes between females and males, implying that humans are primarily categorized into females and males based on their biological and genetic attributes. This classification has defined distinct biological roles for females and males. As societies and social frameworks progressed, social and cultural obligations have also evolved differently for females and males. This distinction is understood as gender. Numerous scholars have explored the concept of gender from their perspectives.

Likewise, Lorber (1994) has argued that gender is depicted as a social framework that orchestrates the societal operations of daily existence. Within the social framework, institutions such as the economy, philosophy, family, and politics are established. Much like language and kinship, which are products of human creation, Lorber asserts that gender is also a construct crafted by humans within societal contexts. In this sense, Ortner (1974) has explained that in all societies, culture takes precedence over nature. It serves as how humans control and govern natural elements. Human cognition and technological progress are essential parts of culture. Culture's dominance over nature gives it a sense of superiority over natural forces. This prioritization of culture over nature is seen as a root cause for the devaluation of women, as their physical bodies and reproductive processes, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, link them more closely to nature. In this regard,

Bilton et al. (1996) has expressed that gender delineates the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity, influenced by numerous factors.

Moreover, Matson (2005) has claimed that gender is viewed as a fundamental aspect of societal existence, with individuals engaging in gender roles through the process of socialization, and gender being intertwined with power dynamics. It has held significant influence across various spheres including the home, economy, culture, education, law, politics, medicine, and marriage. Stanley and Maxine have contended that gender extends beyond women, as men often perceive themselves as gender-neutral, despite gender norms shaping their everyday interactions within society. In essence, gender divisions have contributed to disparities favoring men over women, creating inequality. In this context, Adhikari (2020b) has explained that gender is a socially transmitted characteristic that differs among societies, signifying traits of masculinity or femininity. Gender serves as a mechanism for identifying and regulating members of society. Furthermore, Bhasin (1993) has explained that while gender has biological roots, the understanding of masculinity and femininity fluctuates across different cultures and historical periods. Moreover, the perception of gender disparities can vary among sub-groups within the same culture, influenced by factors such as class and social status.

The aforementioned concepts emphasize that gender is influenced by social and cultural factors, reflecting the interconnected yet distinct roles, connections, and status of men and women. Gender develops and evolves gradually within specific social and cultural contexts through different processes in various settings. In this context, we have necessary to understand the various sociological theories to analyze gender as a part of social and cultural system of social structure. So, the paper has focused to explore the gender relationships through the theoretical lenses from sociological perspectives.

Objective and Method

Sociologists have developed various theoretical dimensions. Generally, this research has focused to analyze the gender relationship through the theoretical perspectives of sociology such as evolutionary, structural functional, Marxist, social exchange, world system etc. To gain the objective, qualitative data have been gathered by content analysis method under the qualitative research design. Krippendorff (2004) has employed the content analysis research method to collect theoretical data, a technique highlighted by Denzin & Lincoln (1994), Adhikari et al. (2024b), and Adhikari et al. (2024c) for its qualitative research strength in uncovering theoretical origins. Neuman (2007) has also utilized the library research method for gathering qualitative data. The data have been analyzed and linked the concept of gender through the content analysis method on the basis of thematic category of theoretical explanation of sociology. It has been presented through the empirical and observational lens of the researchers that they have pragmatically experienced during the course of life.

Findings and Discussion

The sociology observes the concept of gender from the pragmatic norms of the society and the roles enacted by both males and females in the society. It has observed both pros and cons allocated to the men and women by the socio-cultural structure as being practiced in the various societies.

Evolutionary Theoretical Perspective and Gender

Social and cultural systems as well as the units and inter-relationships of those units within those systems have been formed through a gradual evolutionary process. Any system is the outcome of a gradual evolution. Everything is simple and basic in the beginning, but its form, characteristics and nature transform gradually with evolution. This gradual growth and transformation make the structure and relationships increasingly complex - this is the premise

of the evolutionary perspective (Bohannan & Glazer, 1988). Discussing evolutionary theory, Herbert Spencer has stated that society and culture transform gradually from simplicity to complexity, from equality to inequality, from uncivilized to civilized, from uncertainty to certainty, and from homogeneity to heterogeneity. Units of social and cultural structure like family, food habits, social values, traditions, rituals, relationships and organizations undergo gradual change and reform (Ember & Ember, 1999). He has pointed out that contemporary society has evolved gradually from the stages of hunting-gathering, pastoralism and agriculture to reach the industrial stage. Similarly, James Frazer has discussed the gradual evolution from magic to religion and from religion to science. Tylor (1988) has mentioned that the form of culture has evolved gradually from the savage stage to the barbarian stage and then to the civilized stage. Engels (1902) has quoted to Morgan who has noted that marital and family structures and relationships too have evolved gradually from blood relationships, to group and punaluan marriages, to the syndyasmian (pair) marriage, to polygamy and patriarchy, and finally to the monogamic form seen through the evolutionary lens, the relationship, responsibilities and roles of men and women are the result of this gradual process of evolution. The relationship and roles between men and women have been never static or rigid, but rather constantly transforming. The work of women in the hunting-gathering stage changed when the agricultural stage arrived, and their agricultural stage's responsibilities and work has taken on a different form again with the arrival of the modern industrial stage.

For example, in the primitive age, it was identified matriarchal system where father was not known from the gender perspective. Moreover, the kinship was not identified and even the marital system did not seem to be strictly followed but when the patriarchal system has been established, then the father has been identified and the system of kinship, marriage system as well as social structure has been formed with the passage of time and the process of the change. In the same way, the evolution of the life also has been taken as the example of evolutionary theory.

Structural Functionalism and Gender

Different units exist within social and cultural system. The functioning of those units allows the social and cultural system to exist. Those very units come together to form the overall structure, and it is for the maintenance of that overall structure that those units' function - this is the premise of structural functionalism. A society has various components. Those components are interrelated and interdependent, forming an integrated whole (Murdock, 1949). All the components are unified within that whole. Society is an integrated system of those components. Within the social and cultural system, there are various units such as individuals, religious, traditional, values, norms, customs, laws, acts, rules, festivals and so on (Adhikari et al., 2024a). It is the functioning of those very units that allows the overall social and cultural structure to be maintained. Just as the biological organs of a living body carry out their functions to sustain the body as a whole system, similarly, each component of a society and culture functions while being interrelated with others.

In this context, the sociologist Herbert Spencer has explained about the society based on the biological system analogy. According to Spencer, just as there are functions of various organs within the biological system, so too do components of society like family, marriage, politics, state, economy, religion, tradition etc. have their own functions. Although the functions are different, all the components are interrelated and interdependent for the overall system or structure (Coser, 1996). So, the functionalism and gender are interconnected and interwoven in one another. Similarly, another sociologist, Emile Durkheim has analyzed the division of labor in society and has explained the concepts of "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity". In the primitive era, the social structure was not stratified, there was no clear division of labor in society, and members had simple roles to play - a single individual had to

bear multiple responsibilities. People were bound in solidarity through religion, traditions, kinship and community sentiments - Durkheim called such system as mechanical solidarity. But in modern society, the roles that members have to play become specialized rather than general. Individuals are situated in very specific circumstances. In such condition, the individual's role becomes narrower. Durkheim has termed this kind of solidarity arising from the division of labor as "organic solidarity". He has viewed solidarity as the element that binds the social and cultural system together. "Mechanical solidarity" was a feature of ancient societies while "organic solidarity" is a feature of modern societies (Haralambos & Heald, 2010). It has revealed that the mechanical solidarity of the ancient time has been transformed into organic solidarity.

According to the structural functionalist perspective, within the social and cultural structure, different responsibilities, work, duties and rights are determined for women and men. Otherwise, if everyone plays the same role, it would be almost impossible to operate the social system. It is for this very reason that within the social and cultural structure, responsibilities, work and duties differ for women and men based on gender. And even within women and men, their roles are constructed differently based on age and kinship positioning. For example, the family members have played their roles in different forms as the mother has worked inside home and father has performed his duty outside the house in the ancient period but in modern time both father and mother have been playing the roles of inside and outside simultaneously but by maintaining the structural functional roles of gender.

Marxism and Gender

History has been seen as the product of human efforts to gain victory over natural forces, or of the modes of production (Adhikari, 2020a). According to Marxist theory, since all production takes place within the realm of social organization, and history is a gradual chain of changes within the social system. The entire development of human relations is tied to the system or acts of production. Within this, the economic system performs the function of the "base" and "super-structure". And other related institutions and ideological systems construct the "superstructure". According to Marx, when people engage their lives in social production, it gives rise to certain necessary relations - which is the real base. It is on this base that the scientific and political superstructure stands. In line with this, the form of social consciousness is shaped. It is not human consciousness that determines their existence, but rather their social existence that determines their consciousness (Abraham, 1998). Karl Marx has explained the mode of production in terms of the interaction between the relations of production and the productive forces. According to Marx, the mode of production is the basis of all social systems, and it is on this basis that all other social, economic, ideological and social relations are determined. It is because of the different modes of production in different historical societies that we see different social systems (Ritzer, 2000). In this sense, the Marxist perspective analyzes the social structure in two forms - the "superstructure" and the "base structure". Within the social structure, units like religion, culture, state, law, education, philosophy, thought, welfare, literature, and tradition fall under the superstructure but the base structure of society consists of its mode and relations of production.

The perspective of mode of production always holds that it is the base structure that determines the superstructure. This means that the culture, religion, tradition, philosophy, law, literature, art, thought, education and form of the state are all determined by the kind of mode of production that exists in that society. The superstructure that gets determined in this way helps to sustain the base structure (Ritzer, 1996). Hence, base structure has become the foundation of formation of super structure. The foundation of a society lies not in ideas, desires, ideals, notions, philosophies, laws, ethics etc., but rather in the mode of production of that society. Moreover, it is the nature and form of the mode of production that determines the nature and form of ideas, desires, ideals etc. This encompasses the configuration of the

physical elements of production and the inter-relationships between different groups and classes involved in the work of production. Consequently, when the mode of production changes, there is a corresponding transformation in the nature and form of ideas, ideals, desires etc. It has pointed out that the mode of production determines ideas, desires and ideals from the point of view of the Marxist philosophy.

Analyzing gender or gender relations through the Marxist perspective, we can conclude that the construction of gender is determined by the mode of production. Gender itself is a socially constructed concept that ascribes roles to women and men within society. The work, duties, rights, responsibilities of women or men within a society, and the related laws, traditions, customs, values, norms etc. are determined by the structure of that particular society and culture. According to the Marxist view, it is the mode of production that determines the structure of a society and culture. Therefore, the gender roles present in any society are embedded within that society's mode of production. The status, responsibilities, rights of women and men are assigned in accordance with the mode of production. It is due to shifts in the modes of production that we see a gradual evolution in the forms of society's development, and correspondingly, changes in the division of labor and rights and duties of women and men. For instance, in the primitive communist stage where there was collective ownership over means of production and a collective gathering mode, we see less gender discrimination and the prevalence in the primitive matriarchal families. While in the feudal era based on agricultural production and unequal land distribution and private ownership, there was inequality in wages for women and men, with women engaged in unpaid labor. Similarly, in capitalist society, we see examples of women being objectified and used to promote various commodities in advertisements.

World System's Theory and Gender

The world system's theory holds the view that countries of the world are interlinked in some form through economic relations. This theory argues that with the development of capitalism, the economic, social and cultural relations of local communities get disrupted and get bound towards the world system, forming a world economy. Within this world economy, the countries of the world are divided into different forms like the core region, semi-periphery region and periphery region. There is an open market system. The core region attempts to keep the semi-periphery region dependent, from the perspective of the world system. This perspective of world system has been developed by scholars like Wallerstein, Samir Amin, A.G. Frank among others (Ritzer, 1996). The world system's theory has focused on the open global market system.

In this context, looking through this theoretical lens, opportunities for work for women and men no longer seem limited within the home, family and community, but have become global. The woman who used to go for household work in the neighbor's house now gets the opportunity to earn dollars by going for foreign employment. The man who used to plow the neighbor's fields now gets a chance to earn foreign currency by reaching Arabian and European countries. The possibility of a woman's locally made craft item being sold in the global market seems to be increasing, while local traditional cultural beliefs are eroding, being displaced by new (core region) cultural trends and by external goods gaining dominance, leading to transformations in relations, dress and food habits of women and men. For example, the third world citizens have been going on and on to the advanced nations for the works. In other words, the core region has become the center of labors' attraction for the job opportunities for the citizens of the semi periphery and periphery region and it has become the tangible form of the reality of today. In this sense, the semi periphery and periphery regions never get chance to reach to the core region.

Social Exchange Theory

This social exchange theory holds that just like goods and services are exchanged and traded in the market, within the social structure, individuals originating from different classes and groups like neighbors, relatives etc. participate in various cultural activities like marriage ceremonies, life-cycle rituals etc. and in turn expect the same kind of behavior from all other individuals and groups. Society is considered a social and cultural market place where people exchange respect, disgrace, agree, cooperate, neglect etc. It means the social exchange has become the cultural theory of exchanging honor and disgrace.

Viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, the behavior of a husband towards his wife, a mother-in-law towards her daughter-in-law and the daughter-in-law's behavior towards her mother-in-law, a wife's behavior towards her husband - all seem to depend on the respect, honor, encouragement they provide each other. If the wife brings a substantial dowry at marriage, the husband and in-laws become happy and behave accordingly. On the other hand, if she does not get jewelry according to her dowry, the wife and daughters-in-laws seem to become resentful. It appears that lack of balance in social exchange leads to quarrels between husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, increasing rifts between father and son/daughter, while an increase in the exchange rate enhances mutual compatibility. For example, the structure of the family members and the social structural formations have been constructed within the norms of the social exchange theory.

Theoretical Perspectives of Agency Structure and Actor

For any social structure to come into existence, there has to be an actor performing actions. An individual performs various actions to fulfill their different needs - this is their individual activity. Without the actor, neither does society form, nor do social actions occur, nor does the process of structurization take shape. Hence, the actor's action itself is the primary basis for social structure and the theory of structurization. Explaining the theory of structurization, Giddens has discussed the individual or actor as the 'agent' and institutions or constraints as the 'agency'. In this context, a social structure is the integrated wholeness between groups with different characteristics. The dynamic unity and interdependence in the universal relation of events is the fundamental feature of this social structure and the world. No object can exist in isolation, and in absence of structure, its existence gets destroyed. Opposing elements may exclude each other, but for the existence of one, the other is necessary - this is their unity. It is in the conflict or contradiction between opposing elements and their unity and interaction that they become viable, dynamic and interdependent. This means the social structure operates through the unity of mutually opposing elements.

Right-wrong, good-bad, virtuous-evil, long-short etc. are mutually contradictory aspects, yet they coexist as complementary to each other and are interdependent, influencing one another. This is essentially the process of social structurization. Hence, in the continuous process of formation, destruction and deformation of a structure, there is a balanced existence of the individual actor, action and structure. These are inseparable parts of the edifice of structure - this is the premise of the structure-agency theory. Viewing gender through this structure-agency theoretical lens, although masculinity and femininity are seen as inter-contradictory aspects and concepts, a woman's existence is impossible without men, just as a man's existence is not possible without women. For the operation of the structure, women and men are mutually complementary. This perspective thus seems to promote gender harmony and equality. For example, In the context of gender relation, while talking about the gender, it has been called that men and women are the two wheels of the same cart to go ahead smoothly and in absence of it, the social structure cannot move ahead.

Postmodernism and Gender

Postmodernism is understood as the process of dismantling all traditional norms and practices developed to operate the social and cultural structure, completely disrupting the previously

established methods, meanings and understandings regarding social and cultural reality, and interpreting from new perspective with new meanings and methods. The objective of this theory is considered to be the demolition of whatever facts and theories exist in modern society. This theoretical perspective holds that there is no permanent form of society, community or family. It is merely a manifestation of the continuous streams of our conversations, abstract models, stories and other symbols. The desire and goal of constructing a good world by science unraveling centuries is merely a myth or illusion (Ritzer, 1996). In other words, the postmodernism has pleaded that the gender roles are merely artificial one.

In this context, viewing gender through this postmodernist perspective, all roles and responsibilities developed or imposed in relation to women and men would appear superficial. The roles, responsibilities, duties, dignity associated with women and men, whether provided separately as modern or together in an integrated manner, are mere illusions according to this view. This perspective seems to question the very notions of women, men, husband-wife, mother-in-law-daughter-in-law, father-in-law-daughter-in-law and the various kinship relations and associated duties. For example, no final meaning is possible and no final rules are the rules regarding the gender relation.

Theory of Socialization and Gender

Socialization is the process of learning and internalizing social and cultural structures, norms, traditions, values and beliefs, and adapting accordingly. Talcott Parsons define socialization as the process by which an individual internalizes societal norms and values and constructs the lifestyle. David & Liz (2002) have discussed socialization as a learning process through which people become capable of enacting their roles within the social structure.

From the perspective of socialization theory, gender roles - what women should do, what men should do, what roles they should play, what norms they should follow - are determined by the social structures in which the individual is socialized. Whether male or female, one learns their duties, responsibilities, ideals etc. from their own society. Their roles are defined according to their learning. A young Gurung woman learns that menstruation is normal, while a young Brahmin woman learns to isolate herself and avoids touching things during menstruation. Despite being of the same age, they take it different culturally as defined gender roles, demonstrating the impact of socialization. In this respect, Oakley (1974) has argued that society itself socializes women to become mothers. If fathers do not give dolls to their daughters, social institutions do not pressure women to become mothers, psychologists do not see women not wanting to be mothers as abnormal, and girls wanting to be mothers were not seen as normal, then the number wanting to naturally become mothers would decrease. It is the family and society that, based on socio-cultural values, socializes and compels girls to become mothers through socialization. Not all women want to be mothers, but they are pressured to do so. Oakley states that giving a biological basis to the socially constructed role of mother is the most oppressive idea. Thus, society subjugates women to gender oppression through unequal socialization. The socialization has shaped the gender relation and roles on the basis of the social norms, values and the culture the way the men and women have been brought up.

Conflict Perspective and Gender

The conflict perspective views the units and elements within social and cultural structures as being in constant conflict, contradiction and inter-relation with each other. It is the internal conflict that makes social and cultural structures dynamic. Factors like the nature of private property, differences in income levels, unequal access to and ownership of resources etc. lead to the formation of different classes. These classes have their own interests, desires and needs. In the pursuit of these interests, one class comes into conflict with another. Marx & Engels (1848) has stated that every structure has positive and negative aspects that are in constant conflict, destroying old relations and conditions and creating new ones. likewise,

Coser (1996) has said that due to the differing interests of the various units within social and cultural structures, people are divided into different groups. In pursuing their interests, these units create conflicts. There is a struggle for power and leadership between the powerful and the powerless. If this constant conflict transforms society and culture into a new form, then from the perspective of the conflict, women and men are also units of the social structure with their own interests and needs. In pursuing their interests, there are contradictions between women and men, and between women and women or men and men. It is the very conflicts that create new forms of rights, relations and roles between genders. The formation of the new forms of the rights has become the outcome of the conflicts between men and women, women and women, and men and men. Such conflicts have been found and realized in the society to society.

Critical Perspective and Gender

Critical theory holds that the modern capitalist state system has imposed the dominance of money, commodities and the market over human reason. It only protects the interests of the ruling and capitalist classes, destroying universal human values and norms. In capitalist society, technology itself has been established as a totalitarian force, rendering humans purely mechanical and enslaving them to it. Habermas has said that in liberal capitalism, the public sphere mediates between society and the state and maintains balance. But modern capitalism has translated the public realm of humans into bureaucracy and technocracy. It has enslaved human creativity, intellect and productive capacity. It has pushed humanity into an unconscious, nihilistic and dark state. In modern capitalist society, public freedom has been commercialized and de-politicized by making public bodies and means of communication serve technology and business interests. As a result, public life, society and spaces have been atomized. The emancipation of the public sphere can only come from freedom from the dominance of instrumental rationality pervading capitalist society. It has revealed that critical theory has dehumanized the human relationship.

From the perspective of critical theory, the current capitalist state system has objectified and mechanized the relationship and roles of women and men, depriving them of humanity. It has commodified the intimate human bond between husband and wife, has started comparing maternal affection with money, and has transformed motherhood through technology. It has commercialized the cultural humanistic values, beliefs and roles. In this sense, critical theory has compared human beings with the money and the assets. Such conditions of human life have been observed in the present world.

Conclusion

Gender relationship has been reflected as the part of social structure. Various theoretical perspectives have been found in sociological arena. After analysis of theoretical assumptions as the data, it has been concluded that gender relationships manifest in diverse forms, revealing variations when it has been viewed through theoretical perspectives of sociology. Through the evolutionary lens, the relationship, responsibilities and roles of men and women have been found as the result of the gradual process of evolution. According to the structural functionalist perspective, women and men, and their roles have been constructed differently based on age and kinship positioning. According to the Marxist view, it is the mode of production that has determined the structure of a society and culture. Therefore, the gender roles present in any society have been embedded within that society's mode of production. The status, responsibilities, rights of women and men have been identified that have been assigned in accordance with the mode of production. Looking through the theoretical lens of world system, opportunities for work for women and men no longer seem to have limited within the home, family and community, but have become global. Viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, all gender relationships seem to have found to depend on the respect,

honor, and encouragement that they have provided each other. Viewing gender through the structure-agency theoretical lens, although masculinity and femininity have been seen as inter-contradictory aspects and concepts, a woman's existence has been realized impossible without men, just as a man's existence has not become possible without women. For the operation of the structure, women and men have become mutually complementary. From the perspective of socialization theory, gender roles - what women should do, what men should do, what roles they should play, what norms they should follow - have been found to be determined by the social structures in which the individual has been socialized. According to conflict perspective, there have been contradictions between women and men, and between women and women or men and men. These kinds of conflicts have been found to create new forms of rights, relations and roles between genders. From the perspective of critical theory, the current capitalist state system has been found to be objectified and mechanized the relationship and roles of women and men, depriving them of humanity.

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