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# Feminism and Patriarchy: Social Political Philosophy for Competitive Exams (2021)

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### **Feminism**

- The ideology of feminism is often misunderstood with just women and women's rights.
- In reality, the ideology behind the concept of feminism is much vast, it not only focuses towards women's right but also puts equal emphasis on men's rights and rights of the people belonging to sexual and gender minorities in a patriarchal society.
- In other words, feminism struggles amount for equality among all sexes and genders equally.
- Feminism is not about only women, but about understanding the ways in which people are produced, fashioned and inserted into a patriarchal society as proper "men" and "women" .
- Therefore, feminism is nothing but a fight against discrimination and violence inflicted on the bodies belonging to the world who are forced to conform to the social norms and traditions of a patriarchal society.
- In other words, feminism as a social movement aims at the removal of all discriminations against women and minorities in terms of their rights, opportunities, development, growth, etc.
- The philosophy of equality and equal status amongst all being is called feminism.
- Simply put, feminism inquiries into the causes of sufferings, discriminations, and deprivations of women and minorities, and attempts to correct them or take necessary measures for restoring their due share in power, prestige, respect and wealth in the society.

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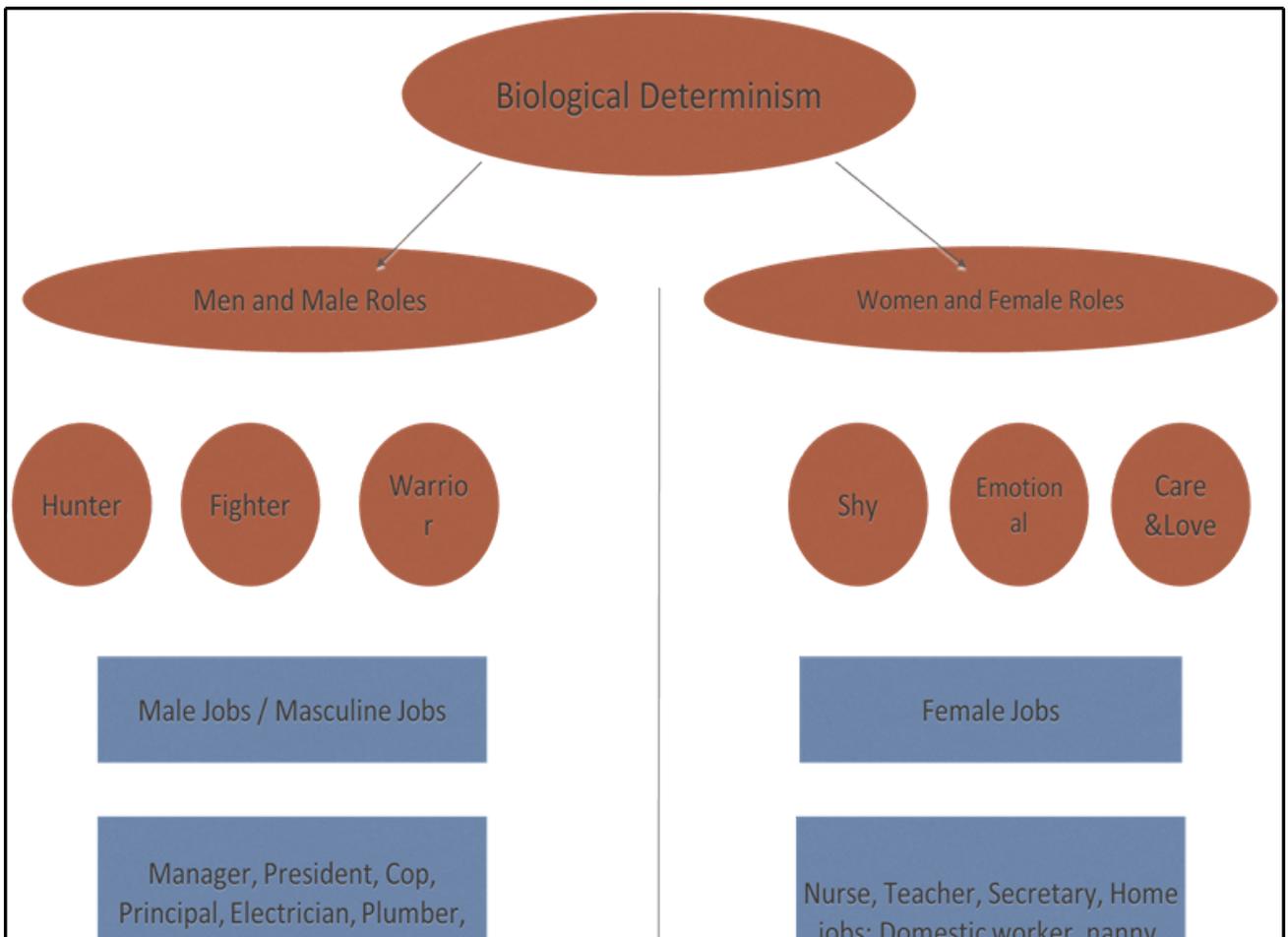
### **Patriarchy**

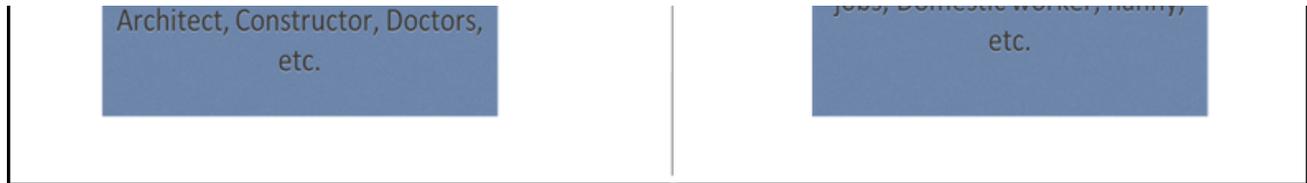
- Patriarchy means the rule of the patriarch.
- In other words, it means the " rule of the men (father, brother, husband, etc.) .
- Patriarchy is a social system which is based on the premise that the male is superior than the female, as a result, the former shall rule over the latter.
- Simply put, it is the authority of the male head/males to head the family, society, etc. It means male domination is general, it includes domination of men over women in domestic, economic, political, etc. spheres of life.
- Feminists against Patriarchy:
- According to Sylvia Walby in her work, *Theorising Patriarchy*, patriarchy is more than just a term, she writes, "Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."
- She explains patriarchy as a system because it helps feminists reject the notion of biological determinism which has been extensively used by the Western philosophers.

### **Biological Determinism**

- Biological determinism asserts that men and women are naturally different because of the difference in their biology.

- As a result, both of them get different roles to play in the society, they have different places assigned to them on the premise of their roles due to which their behaviour varies.
- Biological determinism ties gender necessarily with sex and fixes both the notions as naturally coextensive in nature.
- For instance, the body of a man is solidly built because of which the outside world belongs to him, he becomes a hunter, a provider, protector and his behaviour is masculine in the sense that he is aggressive, competitive, non-emotional, active, etc.
- On the other hand, the body of a woman is regarded as weak because of which she is limited to the household and her behaviour is shy, emotional, passive, loving, caring, etc.
- Patriarchy practices this popular model for understanding the gender-sex relation within men and women in the society asserting masculinity as a natural outcome of male body and femininity as a natural outcome of female body.





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## Misogyny

- Misogyny means hatred for, dislike of, contempt for or prejudices against women.
- In defining a woman, some of the prominent figures of the Western philosophy have formulated their views in a pure negative terminology, propounding blatant misogyny.
- For example, according to Aristotle, women are incapable to reason, Aristotle regarded reason as the defining mark of human beings. For him, rational capacity alone differentiates humans from animals. Or rather, men from animals.
- Aristotle also places the patriarchal family as the central concept of the state.
- He argues for women's submission to men on the premise that like the mind (or soul) must rule the body, similarly, the male must rule the female because a woman's nature suffers from natural defectiveness.

## The Sex and Gender Debate



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- Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work, *The Second Sex*, challenged the ideology of biological determinism and emphasised the gender-sex relation by understanding sex as the natural bare biological fact of the body

and gender as a social construct which is shaped by factors apart from the sex.

- In the *Second Sex*, Beauvoir questions the ideals of masculinity and femininity formulated by the patriarchal society that results in establishing and perpetuating the differences between the two sex which inevitably leads to a naturalised inferior status for women in the society.
- de Beauvoir writes, “Little girl continues to be cajoled, she is allowed to hide behind her mother’s skirts, her father takes her on his knees and pats her hair; she wears sweet little dresses, her tears and caprices are viewed indulgently, her hair is done carefully done, older people are amused at her expressions and coquettishness- bodily contacts and agreeable glances protect her against the anguish of solitude. The little boy, in contrast, will be denied even coquetry: his efforts at enticement, his playing-acting are irritating. He is told that ‘a man doesn’t ask to be kissed ... A man doesn’t look at himself in mirrors ... A man doesn’t cry’. He is urged to be ‘a little man.’”
- The difference between the two sexes is established and propounded right from the childhood days where boys and girls are trained in separate behavioural treatments. The socio-cultural practices of the patriarchal society ensure that each one conforms to their gender appropriate behaviour only, always.
- Thus, de Beauvoir’s famous claim, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” theorises a crucial aspect of gender that it is a social construct.





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- Judith Butler in her book, *Gender Trouble* criticises de Beauvoir's stance and puts forth some startling arguments by explaining how the available vocabulary used for defining the gender-sex relation overlooks and conceals the fact that sex in itself is perceived through the lens of gender in a society of a patriarchal kind.
- According to Butler sex does not exist outside social and cultural meanings because it is a social construct. We do not understand a body by the constitution of various patterns of chromosomes but rather perceive them within the rigid binary, only within the male and female frame.
- The demarcation of two sexes, male and female is not descriptive but normative in nature.
- A patriarchal set-up makes it imperative that there are only two natural sexes in the world and excludes or marginalises those whose anatomy does not adhere to the binary parameters of heteronormativity.
- For instance, intersex bodies possess several variations in chromosome, gonads, sex hormones, genitals that do not fit into the typical definition for a man's or a woman's body. They are either disciplined into normalcy through medical and surgical intervention into one of the two sexes, or are declared abnormal or illegal.

### Questions

1. "One is not born a woman but becomes a woman" is said by

- A. de Beauvoir
- B. Virginia Wolf
- C. Judith Butler
- D. None of these

Answer: A

Explanation: de Beauvoir's famous claim, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" theorises a crucial aspect of gender that it is a social construct.

2. According to whom, gender is a social construct?

- A. de Beauvoir
- B. Virginia Wolf
- C. Judith Butler
- D. None of these

Answer: A

Explanation: The difference between the two sexes is established and propounded right from the childhood days where boys and girls are trained in separate behavioural treatments. The socio-cultural practices of the patriarchal society ensure that each one conforms to their gender appropriate behaviour only, always. Thus, de Beauvoir's famous claim, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" theorises a crucial aspect of gender that it is a social construct.

3. Hatred for, dislike of, contempt for or prejudices against women is called

- A. Feminism

- B. Misogyny
- C. Patriarchy
- D. Both B and C

Answer: B

Explanation: Misogyny means hatred for, dislike of, contempt for or prejudices against women. In defining a woman, some of the prominent figures of the Western philosophy have formulated their views in a pure negative terminology, propounding blatant misogyny. For example, according to Aristotle, women are incapable to reason, Aristotle regarded reason as the defining mark of human beings. For him, rational capacity alone differentiates humans from animals. Or rather, men from animals.

4. According to whom sex is a social construct?

- A. de Beauvoir
- B. Virginia Wolf
- C. Judith Butler
- D. None of these

Answer: C

Explanation: sex in itself is perceived through the lens of gender in a society of a patriarchal kind. According to Butler sex does not exist outside social and cultural meanings because it is a social construct. We do not understand a body by the constitution of various patterns of chromosomes but rather perceive them within the rigid binary, only within the male and female frame.

5. According to \_\_\_\_\_, men and women are naturally different because of the difference in their biology.

- A. Biological Indeterminism
- B. Biological determinism
- C. Patriarchy
- D. Misogyny

Answer: B

Explanation: Biological determinism asserts that men and women are naturally different because of the difference in their biology. As a result, both of them get different roles to play in the society, they have different places assigned to them on the premise of their roles due to which their behaviour varies.

#Feminism

#Biological

#Determinism

#Patriarchy

#Misogyny

#deBeauvoir

#Butler

#Sex

#Gender

