

NIRANJANA, SEEMANTHINI: Gender and Space-Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body, Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd .New Delhi110048, 2000, pp143, Rs.325.

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Of late different types of studies on gender have focused discernible light on the diversified corners of human understandings. These attempts have very naturally opened up the doorways of a more or less neglected sphere of the social system. Women constitute nearly half of the population of the world but in spite of this fact they have never received requisite attention, rather patterns and philosophical perceptions in a particular social setting cannot be effectually presented without putting necessary stress on the womenfolk. In the chequered social system in India, women not only find themselves in variegated situations—both favourable and unfavourable—but also they are to cope up with the different social norms and traditions that have been framed through the ages. Thus the life and activities of the women are always in interactional process which many a time give rise to conspicuous, unfortunate situations. It is required that the varying range of women's status and conditions in different social settings should be enquired into have a proper dip into the situational context. Thus there has developed an activated effort to remove the gender based inequalities.

The present work, entitled “Gender and Space-Femininity, Sexuality and the female body” by Seemanthini Niranjana, is an example of an effectual attempt in exploring a specific dimension of the women. The centre of focus of this discourse is to bring into light the nature and extent of the specific patterns of life and activities of the women in the background of the conceptual factors like space and gender. The bodily practices of women within diverse context and settings inform so many things which are conditioned by various behavioural stance that illustrate the variegated facets of femininity and sexuality of the women.

The book has been divided into eight chapters excluding analysis. The effectuation of this sort of gender study has been established through relevant arguments. For the convenience of the readers the authoress here explains the terms like gender, space, femininity and sexuality which are the basic concerns of this book. The issues of femininity and gender, and their social construction involve, as authoress identifies, two specific aspects: one is related to the descriptive account of the socio-cultural constitution of gendered identities and the other indicates an analytical development of the discourse of femininity

through the exploration of the organisation patterns of social relations and social practices of the social setting concerned. The conceptualization of gender indicates a slight different view point. The category of gender viewpoints not merely biological differences between male and female- this binds itself in the socio-cultural and material practices as well as institutional and ideological discourses. Space indicates an event which is open or there is a situation of emptiness. This space has got a dominant phase of relation with gender. It has been assessed in this book, that gender and space are better approached as sets of relationship between phenomena and various groups of people that are negotiated within certain given forms of reference. The chapter following it highlights the implication of gender studies in anthropology. Women have always formed a conspicuous part of the subject matter of anthropology. It advocates for the inclusion of gender based study in its dimensions to get the fuller view of the human-centres discussions. The women should not only be brought direct to the arena of study but also they must be studied by the female investigators. The place of women in the socio-cultural matrix of the villages studied by various scholars has been questioned through the analysis of different villages' studies. Gender and space have been analysed systematically in chapter two and these concepts are found to be evaluated from the various works done on village level. The authoress has suggested, that gendered bodies are immediately spaced and spacing, they themselves are constituted in space. In connection with this an attempt has been made here to make a difference between metaphorical space and material space. She argues that focusing on space and the body's relation to space-social as well as physical-provide the investigators with a tool for achieving the transcendence of the culturist-materialist polarity when the body comes to be inserted in the process of investigation.

In the perspective of feminist argument it is stated that the body is the central material for anchor for discourses on gender and sexuality, and on the basis of which question has been raised how the female bodies inhabit and negotiate space and how space figures in the day to day living of the womenfolk. These questions can profitably be answered if the spatiality characterizing women's everyday life is analysed in the materialistic procedural context. The subject matter of discussions of the third chapter is to highlight the women's location in space which is based on two-tiered understandings. The first one is the discernment of the village as 'safe' for womenfolk whereas the second one tries to further localize the space. It focuses on the impact of household on the women and their activity patterns to negotiate the variety of situation and circumstances which very naturally take

them beyond the physical space of the household; caste/class influences working in the socio-spatial matrices in the village society have played positive role in shaping the psycho-social perspective of women in spatial circumstances and in the discussions it has been asserted that spatial considerations are central to the articulation of a logic of everyday life of the women in Aladapalya has been illustrated. The life concerned is a closely knit system of norms and values –these very often impinge on the women’s behaviour-patterns, various stages in the life-cycle are characterized by the integrated facets of femininity and sexuality. The relation between ritualistic performances and the bodily perspective of women, their purity and pollution concepts in the background of various bodily statuses has been categorically analyzed in the next chapter. The transition from girlhood to womanhood is distinguished by certain thoughts and behaviour which are exclusively related to the women. Marriage work as a crucial turning point for a girl and through this she is realized by the community as a woman. Wifehood and motherhood are the two meaning full stages round which diversified rules and regulations have been working through the ages. In the ritualistic perspective, very significantly termed as the ritual spaces, the women’s roles are not only inevitable but also multidimensional. Observance of multifarious bratas and worship of the different deities are significant in this regarded. Most of observances are non-specific. Women, especially the married women, are regarded as responsible for the protection of the people from various misfortunes. The norms and traditions centring round various ritualistic performances control the behaviour-patterns of women. Various resistance faced by the women in social as well as economic level are based on different agencies. The authoress has examined here various features derived from the constant invocation of socio-spatial coordinates in both the farming disputes and their resolution. The tension within the family and its escalation results complicated situation amongst the inmates and in this state of affair women’s activities in their social space are very much significant to bring back normality. The large mass of ethnographic data collected and thereby interpreted in this book highlights proficiently the integral dimension of the domestic space of the women.

The physical and social practices relating to behavioural and bodily features of action opens up the broader details of femininity and sexualisation of women. The habitual bodily practices of women, which pin-point various ideas and values that contributes to the sexualisation bodies, can only be highlighted if one treads the margins between inner and outer spheres of life-activities. The body has got a specific sociological concern in addition to the biological patterns. Anthropological interpretation of this bio-social feature of body and

its various working dimensions has framed the substantial part of feminist anthropology. It is the social concern which helps in the clear perception of the gender traits based on different social phenomena. Both, that is, femininity and masculinity are culturally constituted across diversified socio-cultural contexts. The work has been focused on this issue-oriented line to approach to evaluate the nature, extent and working patterns of the female body which is fashioned in space, time and culture. All the chapters are well-written but the introductory part seems to be less explanatory because of the fact that the concepts dealt within the different chapters have not been perfectly illustrated to help the readers capturing the specific spirit of the work so beautifully done by the writer. The book no doubt proves to be a meaningful addition to the realm of gender studies in India.