

**Classical Sociology Theory**  
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**Lecture No. 53**  
**Perkins Gilman and the Gender Question**

Welcome back to the class, and you know that we have discussed a series of social scientists or thinkers when we consider as people who contributed for the emergence of classical social theory. We start from Saint-Simon to Tocqueville, to Auguste Comte, I do not need to recount the names. But we are discussing at least some 8 to 10 important people. Some of them Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and G. H. Mead we discussed at length, and several others, we did not spend much time. And so, we, I can maybe confidently say that we have more or less covered some of the important or most of the important theorists of classical sociology that any student of sociology will be studying across the globe.

Now, when I say that these are the people whom we usually discuss in any of the undergraduate classrooms across the globe, this also we must know that, why that we have selected these 8 to 10 people and are only these people who are really responsible for the growth of the discipline, have we avoided some people, have you failed to include some people, or do these people really represent all that has been written about sociology or about a scientific way of studying society during this particular time, what we understand as a time of classical social theory.

These are very, very difficult questions. These are very difficult questions, then you enter into the realm of the relationship between power and knowledge production. We know that the very reason why some of these scholars are so prominent is not only because you know, they came up with some of the very fascinating theories, there were a host of other issues, which actually made them more popular, made them very, very, extremely powerful, extremely popular, extremely influential.

And this is so in the case with the natural sciences, this is so in the case with historians, everywhere. There are a lot of people who are the kind of unsung heroes, there are a lot of people whose stories have not been recorded properly. Or they are a lot of people who were very systematically kept

aside by the powerful sections of society. And the very character of sociology that it is understood as a discipline that emerged in you, its inherent Eurocentric character itself. That itself prevents us from looking at other the kind of sociological arguments that must have emerged elsewhere in the world. And we began this class by discuss, this course by discussing about Evan Cauldron, is not it; a very, very important figure.

But even Evan Cauldron has been recognized, he has been credited with this position sociologist. He has been credited with this much of importance only very recently. So, the very aspect, the very process of colonialism, and the kind of power structure, it plays a very important role in deciding who are the most important people and who are the people who are not so important. And these factors are sometimes quite important along with their actual contributions, their arguments, and the quality of their scholarship, and so on.

And also, there are others during these particular times in Europe itself, because of their social identity, because of their position, they being a woman, they being a, belonging to the black, who were never given the kind of respect that typical white male scholar must have to commanded. And we have discussed, I think you must be remember that we discussed about Cronus, that he had this Jewish background. And his Jewish background really haunted him. So, we talk about a series of such kind of factors that really make certain people very visible when you look at the history of a particular discipline and some people kind of absolutely marginal.

And another important point that I want to bring in here before going ahead with the discussion of two people is that you must have noticed that when we discuss classical sociological theory, especially when we take a kind of a critical approach, a critical evaluation of these important scholars, like Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Mead, or Cooley. So, we often say that we often try to look at what have they spoken about colonialism, or what have they spoken about gender. And we realize that they have spoken nothing much about that.

Further, it is the case of Marx or Weber or Durkheim, of course, they were aware about it, they have written about it but they were really writing, they were engaging in the kind of scholarly activities at the peak of colonial expansion, the peak of colonials. And they have seen the

aftermath of slavery. The question of race was not a major theme for them, the question of gender was a main theme for them.

Most of these people assume social science as the science by the men, for the men and of the men. So, that is very evident, even in their writing; their examples that they give, the kind of attention that they give to women, it is very less or they really refrain from looking at these courses of society from the perspective of identities. And they believe that these identities, the social identities like that of your color, your ethnicity, your gender, these things will become irrelevant once you become kind of modern. And that could be one reason why they really thought what to look in that.

Or they believe that is a less important factor. And especially from a typical Marxian perspective, you do not give so much of importance to the social identities, you think that they all will lose their significance when you establish an egalitarian society. But the history has taught us that that has simply has not happened. And especially after 1960s and 70s, these identities have come to the form. Especially with the rise of theories, what we call it as postmodern theories, the kind of feminist upheaval, and a host of other Identitarian movements from 70s and 80s onwards.

We are talking about the social identities coming to the form. Especially the questions of gender, the questions of race. So, these are the two theme, the question of gender, and the question of race, the two themes that are not adequately addressed by the classical sociologist we have discussed so far. It does not mean that there were no scientists or no scholars who address these issues then, there were, but they were, they are hardly included in any conventional sociology textbooks almost anywhere in the world.

Maybe now, when you look at, when you try to create an alternative history of it as were the early feminists thinking, think of feminist scholars or sociology, then you will have to dugout, you will have to identify these people and they come but they are never, they never assumed the kind of a mainstream position. They are always seen as the in the margin. So, is the case in the question of color, the question of race.

So, these kind of a blind spots, this kind of blind spot, either intentional or unintentional blind spots are something very important that a sociologist student needs to be really sensitive. So, what I have decided, I decided to discuss two important people. One is Perkin Gilsman, Perkins Gilman; a important feminist writer from USA, and Dubois, another important sociologist who belong African-American group.

And these two people have you know, they lived along with the, with some of the greatest sociologists of all time, whether it is G. H. Mead or Marx Weber, they also understood, they also witnessed the growth of sociology, But they had something more interesting to say about gender and the race. And now, sitting in 2020, we realize that how important their arguments were, even though the mainstream sociology did not identify gender and race as important subjects of analysis. These people throughout their writings, they actually made an argument that gender and race are important areas of because of self.

And because of their social marginality, one because of she was a woman, Perkins Gilman was a woman, and Dubois was a black, he was an African-American; because of these two reasons, they were not given the kind of respect or importance that he actually deserved. And we will discuss the case of Dubois in more detail that we will see despite of being the first person to hold a Doctorate from Harvard University, he was never given a permanent academic position anywhere, in USA and he had to go to Ghana and then live there until his death.

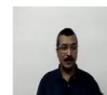
So, these bitter lessons are something important that a sociology student must be really careful about the, must be sensitive about. So, let us very quickly look at Perkins Gilman and the gender question. We do not need to go deeper into that but I just wanted to tell you about story of this woman who lived in the early twentieth century, who very forcefully argued for a women-centric understanding of society and family and society and culture.

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- Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was born in Connecticut, USA



- She views society through the lens of gender. Her major themes include the dominance of a male culture over a female culture, the economic subordination of women, the necessity of transforming the family in an egalitarian direction, a belief in social evolution, and a conviction that rationality can guide social change in a progressive direction.
- Perkins Gilman is heavily influenced by the Darwinism prevalent in her time. Like Mead, her work demonstrates that Darwinism could be used in many ways, not just as a justification for laissez-faire.



So, Perkins Gilman, she view society through the lens of gender. And you know that the very discipline of feminism, it has a single agenda of looking at a social phenomenon through the lens of gender. And her major themes include the dominance of a male culture over female culture. And it is very interesting to see that she really believed that these two kind of cultures are quite different. She believed in that.

And she believed that both the male culture and the female culture are incompatible, they are mutually opposite, they are exclusive, a position which quite a lot of contemporary feminists would find it extremely problematic, especially with the recent arguments about performativity, and others. These kind of arguments were very controversial, but you need to keep in mind her time, a lady born in 1860, and who wrote through 1910s, 20s, and 30s. Female culture, the economic subordination of women, the necessity of transforming the family in an egalitarian direction, a belief in social evolution, and a conviction that rationality can guide social change in a progressive direction.

You would have by now recognized that even the contemporary feminist scholarship or feminist activism still revolves around these, many of these issues; about the family, about the economy or the question of economic dimensions of gender exploitation, and gender discrimination. But they may not believe in the whole question of social evolution. And I do not think that feminist

theory any longer believes that a kind of a rational, a rational orientation can bring in a gender-neutral society or a progressive direction.

Perkins Gilman is heavily influenced by the Darwinian, Darwinism prevalent in her time. Like Mead, her work demonstrated that Darwinism could be used in many ways, not just as justification for laissez-faire kind of a society. So, she was a product of her time, a time when Darwinism was extremely popular, almost every social scientist where the salt, were influenced by that. So, they all believe that human beings are trying to are competing with each other and they are evolving, they are responding, they are adapting to the kind of situations and then emerging as better suited.

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- She argues that men and women live in different cultural universes, which are grounded in childhood and evolutionary development. Girls and boys learn gender differences as children - notions that boys are aggressive and rational and girls are emotional and caring - which are replicated in later life.
- In her words, the "main avenues of life are marked 'male'. Women are effectively prevented from participation in science, literature, and other fields because of their lack of exposure to these areas, and because men have shut them out of these institutions.
- The basic female orientation is to construct and build culture and relationships, qualities which are neglected in the modern world: "the constructive tendency is essentially feminine; the destructive masculine."



So, she argues that men and women live in different cultural universes, which are grounded in childhood and evolutionary development. So, this is a very important point that I just mentioned earlier. She believed that both men and women, they occupy completely different kind of culture. And that is mainly because of this questions of upbringing and the kind of evolutionary development. Girls and boys learn gender differences as children, notions that boys are aggressive and rational, and girls are emotional and caring, which they replicate in later life.

And we know that every basic lesson of gender studies will tell you that how these gender roles or gender stereotypes are perpetuated, and how we very efficiently teach smaller children about what is the most appropriate gender role or gender action that they need to follow. We know that starting from the color preferences, the kind of toys that they get to play with, and the kind of games that they are supposed to play, the kind of films that they are supposed to enjoy.

There is a very clear demarcation between the taste of the boys and the tastes of the girls and it is nothing but a socially constructed ideas, which helps only to reinforce the kind of gender stereotypes and the resulting gender segregation, and the gender discrimination. In her word words, the main avenues of life are marked 'male'. Women are effectively prevented from participation in science, literature, and other fields because of their lack of exposure to these

areas and because men have shut them out of these institutions. An extremely important theme even relevant now.

Even relevant now, we still talk about 33 percentage of reservation for women in the Parliament, still not yet, become a reality. We talk about the abysmal representation of women in the higher education institutions, especially in IITs and in science and STEM disciplines; science, technology, mathematics and science you know, disciplines; in engineering, in space science. So, these are some of the fields which are occupied by men. And you can then imagine the situation of this 1900s when Gilman is talking about it.

So, it is, main avenues of life are marked by 'male', and it is all you know, made as kind of a monopoly by woman and these, and other fields because their lack of exposure to these areas, and because men have shut them out of their institutions. We talk about glass ceilings, I hope you have heard this term. In a tall building, which only has floors made of glass. From the bottom, when you look up, you see it as a canoe without any kind of hindrance but the moment you try to go up, you are hit by the kind of a glass ceiling; un-seeable kind of hindrances. And this term is very popular to know to explain the kind of experiences that women face in their professions, in their professional life.

So, the basic, a female orientation is to construct and build culture and relationship qualities which are neglected in the modern world. The constructive tendencies essentially feminine; destructive, is masculine. So, that is the point that I mentioned earlier. She believes in that kind of a very you know, binary kind of qualities. And feminists of our times, contemporary times, will not agree with this kind of characterization.

This is some kind of an essentialist tic attribution that women are nurturing in character, they are more emotional, they are more creative, whereas men are more destructive. Feminism has gone beyond these you know, oversimplified arguments, but she has a very important point to make there.



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- Men have created coercive governments, a competitive capitalist economy, and an educational system which divides the world into winners and losers.
- Men and women must come to value female traits of endurance, adaptability, giving, and social service, rather than the male characteristics of war and competition. For Perkins Gilman, the truth of life is growth, not combat and rivalry.
- She calls for a more feminine public world of cooperation, and a private world, especially the family that is specialized and efficient. Women need to participate in politics, for men tend to see the nation as a fighting organization in conflict with other nation-states for regional or even world dominance.
- From a male "androcentric" point of view, it is hard to imagine nations living together peaceably and difficult to envision societies organized along lines other than competition and combat.



Men have created coercive governments, a competitive capitalist economy, and an education system, which divided the world into the winners and losers. Which we very specifically, very beautifully argues that the men have created coercive governments, governments that use coercive apparatus, government that use violence, and a competitive capitalist economy with the kind of results that we see about a smaller group of rich people and the vast majority of impoverished population.

Men and women must come to value female traits of endurance, adaptability, giving, and social service, rather than the male characteristic of war and competition. For Perkins Gilman, the truth of life is growth, not combat and rival. So, she takes a very pass, she makes a very passionate plea or a passionate request that the more peaceful, more important, more valuable traits or cultural traits belong to women and men need to understand that because they make this world unnecessarily cruel. They make this world unnecessarily competitive and violent.

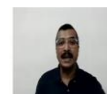
She calls for a more feminine public world of cooperation and a private world, especially the family that is specialized and efficient. Women need to participate in politics, for men tend to see the nation as a fighting organization in conflict with other nation-states for regional or even world dominance. And this becomes these arguments becomes extremely problematic because

she is kind of reducing everything into the kind of a male psyche, why nations go for wars with each other. She is reducing into that, but she has, but that is how so she constructs her argument.

From a male androcentric point of view, it is hard to imagine other nations living together peacefully and difficult to envision societies organized along lines other than competition in combat. And she argues that the quality of cooperation is the most or women embody that quality of cooperation, whereas men embody the traits of competition and conflict, which again is highly problematic as per many of the contemporary sociologist. But she believed that the involvement and participation of more women can bring in a more tolerant and more just society.

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- She criticized idyllic fantasies about the home as camouflaging the oppression of women. She argues that the home and family are shrouded in romantic myths, but should be understood as an institution like any other, such as the workplace or the state. As an institution, the family is characterized by power differentials and conflicts, with a dominant father, subservient mother, and dependent children. The wife is "a private servant."
- The woman's work carried out in the home is demeaning and destructive, performed in isolation. The family and the workplace outside of the home must be transformed to eliminate male dominance and female subordination.
- She argues that most women have no training for raising children and are not good mothers. Children require the care of many others besides the mother and hence community care for children.



She criticized idyllic fantasies about the home as camouflaging the oppression of women. She argues that the home and family are shrouded in romantic myths, but should be understood as an institution like any other, such as the workplace or the state. As an institution, the family is characterized by power differentials and conflicts with a dominant father, subservient mother, and dependent children. The wife is "a private servant".

And this is an extremely important feminist critique, especially a radical feminist critique against family as an institution. There are a lot of feminists, especially from this radical feminist standpoint, they believe that the family is the most important hindrance against, in the way of

realizing a gender-equal world. Because family perpetuates gender inequality, family teaches the values of patriarchy, it prevents women from attaining greater freedom and greater mobility and greater sense of agency.

And many feminists have argued that family need to be broken. And these are some of the important you know, slogans of feminist movements in the Western society, at least in the US and in Europe. So he argues that there is no point in glorifying family or family has traditionally been glorified and that romanticized as a place of love, and affection, and commitment, and then sacrifice.

But you need to have a more clinical understanding, you need to have a more dispassionate understanding of the working of family, then you will see that the very basic rules of family are made in such a way that it always protects the male head; the father or the male members are always given the privileges, whether it is in terms of gender roles, or resources, or all other kind of activities, or the freedom, or agency, or a host of other things. And that is why she called for a very shrewd analysis of the power relation within family. And that was something quite important that Gilman talking about in the early 1900.

The woman's work carried out in the home is demeaning and destructive, performed in isolation. The family and the workplace outside of the home must be transformed to eliminate male dominance and male subordination. So, she argues that the very fact that women are not able to go out and they are, they do the work that their work is mostly limited to the domestic sphere is destructive to the self understanding and then self-image of the woman. And for her own subjectivities, it is something very destructive. The family and the workplace outside the home must be transformed to eliminate male dominance and male subordination.

And this is an extremely important point. Even now, we know the scores of women who have sacrificed their professional life for the sake of family, because there is a heavily romanticized idea of a sacrificial woman, sacrificial mother, who sacrifices everything for her husband and for her children. But feminists have a very serious issue with such kind of romanticization. They

would argue that this, through this romanticization women are kept always on the leashes. She argues that most women have no training of for raising children and are not good mothers.

Children require the care of many others, besides the mother and hence, community care for children. This, I found it a very interesting argument. So, she argues that an ordinary woman is really incapable of rearing the child. And the child also gets to interact only with a single mother. And that is you know, highly limiting in various aspects. And she has a very radical idea about raising the children and taking care of them.

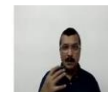
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- In sum, Perkins Gilman argues that the family should be increasingly socialized.



- In Perkins Gilman's view, feminism will transform the world. She writes that the woman's movement "should be hailed by every right-thinking, far-seeing man and woman as the best birth of our century." As women attain economic freedom and equality, democracy will improve. Encouraging people to think outside of the small circle of their family can allow freer social interaction, a prerequisite for democracy.

- She advocates specific women's rights, such as a "woman's right to her own body and to the decision as to when she should become a mother."



So in general, she argues that; Perkins Gilman, argues that the family should be increasingly socialized. She even talks about a kind of a community ownership of children. Children must be taken care by the whole community, and that that is a very interesting argument. And that also talks about how we can create a different kind of a society where parents are not so selfish, parents are not so competitive about their children. Children are no longer seen as the means through which the parents can realize their own desires and their own ideas.

So, in Perkins Gilman's view, feminism will transform the world. She writes that the women's movement should be hailed by every right-thinking farseeing woman and women as the best birth of our century. As women attain economic freedom and equality, democracy will improve.

Encouraging people to think outside the small circle of their family can allow freer social interaction, a prerequisite for democracy.

So, she also argues that the larger participation of women or the equal participation of women, it would improve the quality of public life, it would improve the quality of democracy, it will improve the quality of politics, because women according to her, you know, they have certain inbuilt qualities that cannot be achieved by men. And these qualities are very creative, they are very positive attributes; they are not violent, they are not destructive.

So, she advocates specific women's rights, such as a woman's right to her own body and to the decision as to when she should become a mother. A very, very; even now, these are some of the most important slogans of feminism or women's movement; a woman's right over her body, right over sexuality, right over childbirth, because for a large number of women in the world, these are beyond their imagination. They have right over the body, they have right of their sexuality, the right of their childbirth. So, she was one of the early scholars who, novelist, she was a writer, basically a novelist was written and, so she talks about that in that particular time.

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- She forces men and women to see that masculinity and femininity are social constructions, and that there is no necessarily natural way to organize the family and the economy.
- She recognizes the intersection of economic power and culture. for the two cannot be separated. But her evolutionary theory leads to racism and she has no reflexivity about her racial privileges. She is fearful of "swarming immigrants" who come to the US for free education, free hospitals, free healthcare, and better jobs than they can procure in their home nations



So, she forces men and women to see that masculinity and femininity are social constructions and that there is no necessarily natural way to organize the family and the economy. A very, very important argument. We, why that we are always the slaves of both the you know, images or

imagery constructed as masculinity and femininity? Why that every man is you know, burdened to follow a certain kind of rigid models of being seen as masculine or femininity, for that matter? Why that there is enormous pressure on women to behave in a befitting manner to be that of a woman?

So, she argues that these are all extremely important, very powerful social constructs. And people must be able to move beyond that. And she recognizes the intersection of economic power and culture, for the two cannot be separated. But her evolutionary theory leads to racism and she has no reflexivity about her racial privilege. She is fearful of swarming immigrants who come to the US for free education, free hospitals, free health care, and better jobs than they can procure in their own home nations. So, this is the other side of the story.

While she is able to understand a particular kind of social oppression, that is the gender oppression, at the same time, she is blind to, either she is consciously blind or she is unconsciously blind to the other; the question of racism. In many of her later writings, you will see the kind of she is taking very racial position. She think that America belongs to the white people and she is quite uncomfortable with the swarming immigrants that is the time when America was accepting immigrants from across the globe. And people from across the place from Africa, from Asia, from Latin America, people thronged America and that is what made the America of today.

But she was quite you know, apprehensive of that because she felt that all kind of people are coming and then they are taking away the facilities. So, while she was open, she was quite vocal in terms of gender discrimination, she that kind of ability did not allow her or it prevented her somehow to look at and take a position regarding you know, racial segregation with equal vigor and courage.

So, this is just a, I just wanted to introduce you to this lady because she really represent some of the questions about gender during this particular time, and no major sociologist dealt with the question of gender very directly. And that is what I was mentioning in the beginning of the class, that why and how a discipline evolve, when you look at the history, when you look at the

trajectory of a discipline, you will see why that certain figures are seen as very prominent and why that certain figures are not to be seen, or why they are certain figures are insignificant.

So, these relative appearance and disappearance of figures, it is nothing, not only to do with their intellectual contribution but also a host of other things. And their social positions or their social identities like their race or their gender, they really matter a lot. And Gilman, in that sense, really represent a woman scholar during the early twentieth century, who wrote a great deal about society from a feminist point of view. Though a feminism as an organized disciplinary perspective emerged much, much later.

So, she was one of the early forerunners of feminism in the US and it is important that as sociology students, we are familiar with her at least. So, let us stop the class here and then I will continue with the discussion on Dubois in the next class. Thank you.