



Being a boy or a girl is an important part of one's identity. The society we grow up in teaches us what kind of behavior is acceptable for girls and boys, what boys and girls can or cannot do.

Growing up in Samoa in the 1920s

The Samoan Island is part of a large group of Small Island in the southern part of the Pacific Ocean. In the 1920s, according to research reports on. Children did not go to school. They learnt many things, such as how to take care of children or do household work from older children and from adults. Fishing was a very important activity on the island. As soon as babies could walk, their mothers or other adults no longer looked after them. Older children, often as young as five years old, took over this responsibility. Both boys and girls looked after their younger siblings. But, by the time a boy was about nine years old, he joined the older boys in learning outdoor jobs like fishing and planting coconuts. Girls had to continue looking after small children or do errands for adults till they were teenagers. After the age of fourteen or so, girls also went on fishing trips. Worked in the plantations, learnt how to weave baskets. Cooking was done in special cooking-houses, where boys were supposed to do most of the work while girls helped with the preparations.

Growing up male in Madhya Pradesh in the 1960s

In Madhya Pradesh in the 1960s, boys and girls went to separate schools. The girls' school was designed very differently from the boys' school. They had a central courtyard where they played in total seclusion and safety from the outside world. The boys' school had no such courtyard. Every evening, once school was over, the boys watched as hundreds of school girls crowded the narrow streets. For the girls, the street was simply a place to get straight home. The girls always went in group, perhaps because they also carried fears of being teased or attacked.

Difference between boys and girls:-

Societies make clear distinctions between boys and girls. This begins from a very young age. We are, for example, given different toys to play with. Boys are usually given cars to play with and girls dolls. Both toys can be a lot of fun to play with. Why are girls then given dolls and boys cars? Toys become a way of telling children that they will have different futures when they become men and women. If we think about it, this difference is created in the smallest and most everyday things. How girls must dress, what games boys should play, how girls need to talk softly or boys need to be tough. In most societies, our own, the roles men and women play or the work they do, are not valued equally. Men and women do not have the same status.

Lives of domestic workers:-

Many homes particularly in towns and cities employ domestic workers. They do a lot of work- sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes and dishes, cooking, looking after young children or the elderly. Most domestic workers are women. Sometimes, even young boys or girls are employed to do this work. Wages are low, as domestic work does not have much value. A domestic worker's day can begin as early as five in the morning and end as late as twelve at night! Despite the hard work they do, their employers often do not show them much respect. What we commonly term as housework actually involves many different tasks. A



number of these tasks require heavy physical work. In both rural and urban areas women and girls have to fetch water. In rural areas women and girls carry heavy head loads of firewood. Tasks like washing clothes, cleaning. Sweeping and picking up loads require bending. Lifting and carrying. Many chores, like cooking, involve standing for long hours in front of hot stoves. The work women do is complex and physically demanding- words that we normally associate with men. Another aspect of housework and care- giving that we do not recognize is that it is very time consuming in fact, if we add up the housework and the women spend much more time working than men and have much less time or leisure.

Women's work and equality:-

The low value attached to women's household and care- giving work is not an individual or family matter. It is part of a larger system of inequality between men and women. it, therefore, has to be dealt with through actions not just at the level of the individual or the family but also by the government. Equally is an important principal or our constitution. The constitution says that being male or female should not become a reason for discrimination. The government is, therefore, committed to understanding the reasons for this and taking positive steps to remedy the situation. The government has set up anganwadis or child-care centers in several villages in the country. The government has passed laws that make it mandatory for organizations that have more than 30 women employees to provide crèche facilities. The provision of crèches helps many women to take up employment outside the home. It also makes it possible for more girls to attend schools.

