1. What is gender? Critically examine the concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Ans: Gender
Gender refers to the socially-constructed roles of and relationships between men and women. Gender concerns men and women, including conceptions of both femininity and masculinity. The difference between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ is that the latter refers only to biological differences. Gender does not mean focusing solely on women or females, rather on the inequalities between males and females, and should not be confused with feminism or women’s studies.

Analyses of gender differences often show a disadvantaged and weaker position of women and girls in social, political, economic, legal, educational and physical issues. This is why there is a tendency for gender discussions and interventions to focus on correcting these imbalances by specifically targeting women and girls.

The sex/gender differences raise issues of male – female: masculine and feminine, male associated with masculinity and female with femininity. With each construction the biological differences between men and women get translated into social terms and descriptions. Feminist writers argue that biological differences get heightened through social descriptions of masculinity and femininity. Patterns of differences by gender is seen when the character is either masculine or feminine. For example, pink and blue are gendered colours, former regarded as „feminine” and the latter as masculine. Further to be „strong” and „tough” is masculine. Being „weak” and „soft” are associated with feminine character. There are several other traits that are categorized as masculine and feminine. Masculinity and femininity are concepts which signify the social outcomes of being male or female the traits and characteristics which describe men and women give men advantage over women.

Moira Gatens points masculinity is not valued unless performed by biological male. Hence the male body is imbued in our culture with certain traits that characterize maleness or masculinity. Hence the human norm of male supremacy. Similarly femininity is performed by the biological female. The female body is in our culture is imbued with certain traits that characterize female or femininity. According to Judith Butler any theorization about gender introduces the notion or idea of performance of gender in terms of masculinity and femininity. Thus performance of gender becomes involuntary as gender gets internalized through the socialization process within the dominant discourses of patriarchy gender is performed at different levels within the family and in the society. We socially enter into our gendered categories of masculine and feminine right from birth. The concepts of masculinity and femininity as need in feminist discourses and writing to explain the differences between men and women. Some argue that these differences are based in their biology while others reject this argument and emphasize that the differences are socially constructed. Therefore, the construction of men and masculinity will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males. The construction of women and femininity will accrue exclusively to the bodies of females. In contemporary writings there is a recognition that these social categorization of masculinity and femininity are blurring. There is a constant shift in the conceptualization of human beings as controlled by wholly biological or social forces. Women’s expectations have changed, women lives and roles have broadened. This explain just how malleable the category of femininity is.

2. What are the main theories of gender? Discuss the feminist psychoanalytical thought of America.

Ans: Biological factors play an important part in determining and categorizing us as male or female. Our sex depends on whether we are born with distinct male or female genitals and a genetic program that released male or female hormones to stimulate the development of the reproductive system. Gender involves masculine and feminine feelings, attitudes and behaviors identification with a particular sex - biologically, psychologically, and socially. When we behave according to widely shared expectations about how males or females are supposed to act, we adopt a gender role.

There are two prominent views about the origins of gender differences in human behavior. Some theorists see gender differences as a reflection of naturally evolved tendencies and society must reinforce these tendencies if it is to function smoothly. Sociobiologists call this perspective as essentialism. That is because it views gender as part of the nature or essence of one's biological and social make-up. The second group of sociologists sees gender differences as social constructionism, mainly as a reflection of the different social positions occupied by women and men. They view gender as constructed by social structure and culture.

According to essentialism, humans instinctively try to ensure that their genes are passed on to future generations but men and women develop different strategies to achieve that. Women ensure survival of their offspring by seeking out mate who can best help support and protect them. Whereas men can maximize their chance of passing on their genes to future generations by having many sexual partners. In this regard, men compete with other men for sexual access to women creating competitiveness and aggression. According to Buss these are universal features of our evolved selves that contribute to the survival of human species. Thus, from the point of view of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, gender differences in behavior are based in biological differences between women and men.

Functionalist reinforce the essentialist viewpoint by saying that traditional gender roles help in integration of the society. According to Talcott Parsons, women traditionally specialize in raising children and managing the household. Men traditionally work in the paid labor force. Each generation learns to perform these complementary roles by means of gender role socialization. For boys, the masculinity is defined by the traits such as rationality, self-assuredness, and competitiveness. For girls, the femininity is nurturance and sensitivity to others. Boys and girls first learn their respective gender traits in the family as they see their parents going about their daily routines. The larger society also promotes gender role conformity. In the functionalist view, learning the essential features of femininity and masculinity integrates society and allows it to function properly.