

Unit 1

Chapter 1: Advanced Introduction to Gender Studies

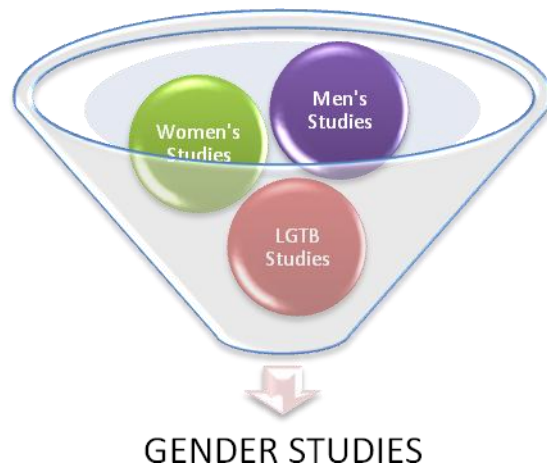
1.1 What is Gender Studies?

Beliefs about what is male or female influence our lives and in fact all products, from clothes and advertisements to social and cultural representations. Our personality and image too are many times determined by the fact that we are male or female! The connotation of gender can change as it is a culturally constructed idea of what sex difference means and this may differ from place to place and in different contexts. Often, society conflates sex and gender and views them as the same thing. Gender is a categorizing code in our society and culture. It is an extraordinary discerning means in the distribution of education, employment, manual labour, care, possession, income generation, organisational aspects or ill health.



<http://www.wvwc.edu/academics/dept/genderstudies/>

We have already discussed about difference between gender and sex in earlier chapters of 11th grade. In sociological terms a 'gender role' refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes of male and female being ascribed as masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviours.



To study gender is to study a fundamental category of identity of an individual, and also a way of categorising human beings that shapes basic structures in a society. Gender is both a factor in how an individual develops his/her identity, and a stratifying principle in society. People of different genders have different sorts of access to resources, and are seen as having different roles and responsibilities. Studying gender also involves studying the ways in which the world around us is gendered: how and why certain attributes of the world are associated with masculinity and femininity. Gender study is a field of interdisciplinary study, drawing upon the theories and methods of diverse disciplines.

Gender studies include women's, men's and LGBT studies, (Figure above) i.e. it focuses on women, feminism, gender, and politics; men's issues and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. Gender Studies not only investigates

the genuine physical and biological differences between women and men, but also reflects critically about what these differences mean in a socio-cultural context. As the socio cultural context varies across time and boundaries, the diversity and elements included in gender studies also varies. In recent time gender studies has established itself as an integral field across cultures and societies.

Read and Reflect

Gendered Illustrations

"If you look at TV commercials, you start seeing how product is marketed by gender," begins Jennifer Pozner, a media literacy educator and author of *Reality Bites Back: the Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*.

"Boys' products tend to be sold with dark colours, language that stresses immediacy and usually focuses on a lone boy dominating his play world. Girls get lighter colours: the pinks, the lavenders. The language is more about nurturing, friendship, popularity and consumption.

Source: "<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/barbie-sports-illustrated-challenge-gender-marketing-children>

1.2 The Relevance and Need to study Gender Studies

Any course in Gender Studies includes a method to appreciate the ideologies, social patterns, and descriptions that shape our world and our lives. It raises questions about how and why a gender divide is created or preserved and also many times, resisted or weakened. Gender Studies explores the multiple interfaces amongst race, caste, class, and gender. It investigates traditional disciplines through an interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on the significance of sex as a social construct and the importance of gender and gender roles. It also advances the historical and existing portrayal of both women and men in religion, arts and literature and many other arenas.

Gender studies is a field that has emerged from women's studies and indisputably is still very strongly correlated in many academic institutions all over the world. As

gender is so fundamental to what we do as human beings, every epistemology has a contribution to make to this field, whether it is psychology, cultural studies, anthropology or any other discipline. Gender studies as a field promotes an understanding of power and privilege in a socio-cultural context. It develops in the learners' sensitivity and promotes critical thinking skills by studying the ways in which gender and sexuality interact with social constructs such as race, caste, ethnicity, class and ability or disability.

1.3 Gender Studies through the historical lens/ Perspectives and Positions of Gender Studies

In India, women started to establish their own organizations from the end of the nineteenth century initially at the local and later at the national level. Major issues that women took up in the pre independence era were political rights and reforms of personal laws. Women's participation in the freedom struggle gave an impetus to the women's movement. The movement got support from individuals and groups. Although, it started with small issues and challenging specific barriers during colonial rules.

Read and Reflect

Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change, or stasis. The term connotes a peaceful form of conflict.

In the post independence era, however the issues broadened to encompass violence against women as well as a greater stake for women in political decision making.

Gender Studies is a field of Study that emerges from activism. Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change, or stasis. The term connotes a peaceful form of conflict. Various forms of activism range from writing letters to newspapers or politicians, political campaigning, economic activism such as boycotts or preferentially patronizing businesses, rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins, and hunger advance strikes. Even though Gender Studies is a relatively new phenomenon, it is today well

established as an interdisciplinary field of study which draws on knowledge from the humanities, the social sciences, medicine, and natural science, law etc.

The basis for the academic field of Gender Studies was in many countries laid in the 1970s, especially in America and Europe after protest from women in the field of academics. The absence of women in the academic work and ignorance in the society became area of concern for them.

Read and Reflect

Empiricism, in philosophy, is the view that all concepts originate in experience, that all concepts are about or applicable to things that can be experienced, or that all rationally acceptable beliefs or propositions are justifiable or knowable only through experience.

This definition accords with the derivation of the term *empiricism* from the ancient Greek word *empeiria* meaning experience

Women studies centres were established where academicians studied different areas from gender relations and women. Feminist ideas and women's movement provided a platform to it which fuelled its progress. The efforts to change the political and social scenario in the society were aimed to be addressed by gender studies. The knowledge generated in the studies made impact in scholarly practices.

Since its inception gender studies has been influenced by different area of studies, making it more interdisciplinary in approach. The field of study has grown and expanded rapidly on a global basis, and given rise to a diversity of specific national and regional developments.



Read and Respond

Discuss the aims of gender studies and analyse how it has evolved as field of study in recent times.

1.4 Feminism

We have discussed the basic ideas about feminism in grade 11. Social equality has been the basic premise on which feminist movement has been based upon. It considers that just because human body is created in different way it does not mean that social functions should be based upon it. Biological being should not be the basis of social and intellectual considerations. It entitles equal right and opportunity to all without discriminating on the basis of any factor or element. There is lot of stress on the idea that there should be no discrimination against anyone, specially women, in civil rights. This social movement of feminism seeking rights of women has influenced gender studies. Feminist movement in India has been influenced hugely by developments in the developed country in one way or other.

Read and Reflect

Feminism is a political, social and cultural movement that aims at equal rights for women.

Women's rights movements in the world dates from the:

- 1600 French women held salons where educated women could interact with men equally
- Late 1700 Movements influenced by Revolutionary War and the French Revolution
- 1792 ENLIGHTENMENT; 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' by Mary Wollstonecraft.

- 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others. Full legal equality with men, educational opportunity and equal compensation.
- 1848 Woman Suffrage Movement in the United Kingdom and the United States. Women gained the right to vote in the 19th amendment in 1920.
- 1940s-50s: Women participate in the Telangana movement
- 1946: Women participate in the Tebhaga movement, in Bengal
- 1960-1970 Women's liberation movement, women entered colleges and joined workforce after world war II
- 1966 National Organization for Women (NOW)
- 1968 First Nationalist Feminist's Conference



Source: <http://classracegender.wordpress.com/2010/04/20/ward-and-june-in-trouble/>

- 1973: Activists including Mrinal Gore and Ahilya Ranagnekar form the United Women's Anti Price Rise Front

- 1975: Women participate in anti-dowry agitations in Hyderabad; after a few years, anti-dowry campaigns begin in Delhi
 - 1970s: Campaigns and agitations against sexual violence and assault begin in India
- 1987: The Roop Kanwar sati incident in Deorala sparks agitation and protests
- 20th century Feminism emerged to address the limited nature of women's participation in the workplace and prevailing notions that tended to confine women to the home.
 - Late 20th century was notable for challenging middle-class white feminists and for broadening feminism's goals to encompass equal rights for all people regardless of race, creed, economic or educational status, physical appearance or ability, or sexual preference.

Read and Reflect

An autobiography published by a woman from a village called Ramdia in rural Bengal in 1865

Indian women in the pre-independent era, often earned “freedom” at the price of social ridicule, ostracism, and harassment; while some women were aided by well-intentioned male relatives, others faced severe familial resistance. Still, the achievements were remarkable.

Rassundari Devi (born around 1809), who was entirely self-taught and wrote the first autobiography by an Indian woman: “I was so immersed in a sea of housework that I was not conscious of what I was going through day and night. After some time the desire to learn how to read properly grew very strong in me. I was angry with myself for wanting to read books. Girls did not read... People used to despise women of learning... In fact, older women used to show a great deal of displeasure if they saw a piece of paper in the hands of a woman. But somehow I could not accept this. (Tharu and Lalitha 1991:199)...”

From Rassundari Devi’s painstaking efforts to trace her son’s lessons in the seclusion of her bedchamber at night, Bengali women progressed rapidly. In 1883 Kadambini Basu and Chandramukhi Basu received B.A.s from Calcutta University, becoming the first female graduates of the British empire. Kadambini went on to train in medicine and practiced as a doctor in Calcutta in the 1880s (Karlekar 1991). Other women became doctors, teachers, and educators. Women’s education also proceeded apace

in urban centers like Bombay, Poona, and Madras. Remarkable women like Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi, Tarabai Shinde, Haimavati Sen and Saraladevi, some privileged and some not, challenged patriarchal constraints, at least in their own lives, and some went on to participate in the emerging nationalist movement (Forbes 1994; Chakravarti 1998).

Source: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.195.9810&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Read and Respond

Some of the Feminist theories and Ideologies

Liberal feminism: It follows a basic consideration that women and men are both equally rational and have equal right to choose and act. And, both are equally eligible for any type of role to be played in the society, whether social or political. It emphasises on the fact that all women are equally capable of asserting their rights.

Postcolonial feminism: Colonial rule saw lot practices which oppressed and marginalised women in economic and political sphere. The struggle for equality and independence was central to the postcolonial feminism.

Countries like India saw postcolonial feminism focusing on racism and barriers due to colonialism.

Radical feminism: Radical feminism tries to understand the root causes of women's oppression. It identifies this root to be patriarchy, which must be surmounted for women to overcome their oppression.

Write short note on following, highlighting main points of the ideology.

Socialist feminism

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Postmodern feminism

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Read and Respond

Study at least three different feminist movements across different countries and analyse similarities and differences between them. Discuss the conditions that lead to such movements. Try to find any similar movements in India.

1.5 Feminism in India

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women.

The cause for which feminists in India has worked towards is not very different from around the world in general. For example following issues have always been major areas where equality has been sought by feminist movements across India in different times:

- Right to work and to earn equal wages
- Equal access to health
- Equal access to education
- Equality in social and political rights

According to Geraldine Forbes (1982: 525), the 'first wave' of feminism in India was the period between the years 1880–1940

The struggle against violence in different forms has been a common area among feminist movements across globe. But, there has been some typical features in Indian context where the need to fight against some culture specific issues has also arose, and,

in certain cases still going on. Issues from Sati and dowry practices have always been burning issues among all.

Read and Respond

Divide your class among three groups and study following three eras of Indian history:

- Early colonial rule (before start of 20th century.
- Gandhian era.
- Post independence

Find out which were the major issues related to women that became a cause for struggle during that time. Also discuss how these issues were dealt during that time and how the situation is different at present from that time.

What are the differences you observe during these three eras.

The history of feminism in India can be studied in three phases which are struggle against practices like Sati during earlier colonial era and then women's movement during independence which was supported by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and then post independence era where focus shifted to rights, fair treatment and participation of women.

Abolishment of *Sati pratha* has been a major step which was achieved by people led by Raja Rammohan Rai. During this time only lot of issues related to women came to highlight and struggle for reforms started from different pockets and spread across India. Participation of women

was limited in the reform at that time which changed with time when female family

Pandita Ramabai (1858 -1922)

an Indian social reformer, a champion for the emancipation of women, and a pioneer in education.





Sarojini Naidu

She was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India. She awakened the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She traveled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India.

members of those who worked towards reforms stepped out worked in different areas. Women's education also found strong support at that time.

By the late 20th century, independent organisations of women gained

strength and started making their mark. With the freedom movement of India participation of women also gained momentum in some areas. This activism was influenced by various other

Read and Reflect

In 1916, the Begum of Bhopal founded the All India Muslim Women's Conference with education of women as a prime agenda, apart from provisions of other remedial services for women.

philosophies and movements at that time which addressed human rights. After independence constitution of India gave equal rights to all.

With the formation and participation women in different organizations even after independence, lot of barriers were there because the outlook remained stagnant towards the role of women in society. The

feminist movement challenged the low participation of women as workforce in different areas. The division of labour force prior to independence was challenged by feminists in 1970s. The lack of participation of women in work force other than labour and unskilled sphere of work was resisted and challenged.

The structures which existed in society as caste, tribes, class etc led to inequality among the men and women. The whole campaign had to take care of consideration that empowerment of one group should not further bring inequality for another.

With the advent of 21st century, the feminist movement has gone beyond giving opportunity and right of

parity. Ability to decide their own lives and right determine their own course of life has become important part of it.



Women participating in Chipko movement.

Source: <http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/blog/post/494-embracing-trees-saving-forests---women-and-the-chipko-movement-in-india>

Various discipline emerged during these movements, which became more and more interdisciplinary in approach and expanding

their horizons to diverse areas. For example emergence of areas and fields like media studies gained more attention from gender studies. As media started influencing the society more and more the movements as well as studies both addressed this interface. Fields like sociology, language, history, literature, law, medicine etc were also studied in relation to gender.

With focus on inclusive society being increased with time gender studies also became more inclusive addressing all.

Gender studies has seen an enormous amount of change in recent part after being seen as completely devoted to feminist movement it has now emerged as field which is more diverse and with a much a stronger academic basis. It was in 1986-87, which was during the United Nations decade for women, when University Grants Commission (UGC) invited proposals across the country to establish women studies centre. These

centres focused on research and community action plans for women in society. Women studies were developed within the university education system. The scope of women study centres was well recognised by many. It is still very much seen as women studies in most of the places. But even after lot of hurdles and barriers gender studies has found its presence in institutional systems where this narrow approach is being challenged by academic endeavour of the people who are working towards strengthening the field. The studies go beyond role and challenges to women in society and deals with issues related to other stakeholders in the society.

Read and Respond

List some departments of gender/women studies in India. Analyse the tasks undertaken by them in recent past.

Make small groups in your class and consider those groups to be part of gender/women studies organisation. List tasks your group would do to address the current issues in society around you.

Read and Respond

1. Discuss the need for gender studies as a field of study. What are main areas that you would like to include in gender studies considering the Indian context?
2. Women studies has been replaced or supplemented by gender studies in recent time. What can be the possible reason for shift from women studies to gender studies?
3. What is the role of gender studies in Indian context? Do you think the role of gender studies has emerged from the need to establish gender studies centres across the country? Give reasons for your position.

1.6 Perspectives and Positions of Gender Studies in the West and in India with Particular Reference to Contemporary Times

What is meant by “positions and perspectives” within gender studies?

We have been introduced to gender studies as a field that looks at the world through the lens of gender. This means that it has a focus upon the gendered dimensions of the social world, and tries to understand more about this gendered dimension.

What are the contemporary positions and perspectives that are significant within gender studies? A perspective is a point of view, and a position can be seen as an opinion that we have on a certain issue. In this section, we will try to understand two significant perspectives that have emerged in the field of gender studies.

These are:

- Moving from studying *women* to studying *gender*
- Focusing on the differences between women and understanding the significance of these differences

1.6.1 Women and Gender

The origins of gender studies lie in women's studies. Women's studies came into existence out of a realisation of the absence of women in academia: the lack of empirical knowledge about women, which reflected the specificities of women's lives; the absence of concepts that women could use to understand their own experiences; the lack of importance given to women's economic, social and political lives. Women's studies became an important way of doing away with this invisibility and bringing the lives and experiences of women to the forefront in academia. It provided a wealth of new data about women, and also challenged the theories, concepts and methods of existing disciplines.

Gaining and analysing new knowledge about women is an important part of women's studies. Many contributions continue to be made to existing disciplines. At the same time, the academic study of women itself has also changed, incorporating new perspectives and positions.

The concept of *gender* has been used to identify those aspects of being male or female that are not intrinsically biological in nature, but instead derive from social and cultural meanings of what it means to be either male or female. This term is significant because it provides a way of studying men and women that focuses upon the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity. It does not reduce men and women to being only biological entities. It enables us to see that many aspects of masculinity and femininity that are generally considered to derive from biology, as instead social and

cultural. They are therefore not necessarily fixed and unchangeable, but are instead amenable to change.

The term gender itself has been extended in various ways. It is used to indicate not only the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity, but to indicate the ways in which within a society, understandings of masculinity and femininity are *relational*.

What does this mean? It means that masculinity and femininity derive their meanings in relation to one another, and often, in opposition to one another. Often the features associated with masculinity are the opposite of those associated with femininity. Just as the term 'tall' has no meaning without the term 'short', the terms 'male' and 'female' have no meaning in each other's absence. We would have no way of deciding what 'masculine' traits and characteristics are if we did not have 'feminine' traits and behaviour with which to compare them.

The second important contribution of the concept of gender is that it gives us the scope to see the impact of gendering on those aspects of the social world which might previously have been considered to be gender-neutral. Thus for example, the culture of an organisation can be seen to be gendered, or a political party can be seen to be gendered. This aspect of the term gender also allows us to look at gender as something that not only involves individuals (through their performance of social roles), but also is a feature of social institutions and social practices.

It is important to note that when we talk about gender, we do not only talk about women. The term gender allows us to talk about men and women: it is not simply a stand-in for 'women', though it may be incorrectly used as such. Looking at the social world as gendered prevents us from looking at masculine traits and culture as the norm against which women and femininity are to be measured. When we look at the social world as gendered, we need not look at it as gender-neutral. Instead, we see it as promoting and propounding certain types of masculinity and femininity.

1.6.2 Differences between Women

Read and Reflect

Think of a public space like a park, which is visited by different people throughout the day. How would different people experience the park? What requirements would they have to be safe and comfortable in the park? Think of the following:

- A woman who is in a wheelchair and requires a ramp to enter the park.
- A group of girls who come to the park to play badminton.

- A woman employed as a nanny, who brings children to the park to play.
- A group of men who work nearby and use to park to rest during their lunch break.

Some of the major contributions and challenges that have been made to both academic knowledge about gender and the women's movement itself have come from women who have explored the ways in which different women have different experiences of the social world. At some level, the fact that different women have different life experiences may be seen to be something quite obvious. After all, we see different women around us all the time: women of different communities, ages, from different class backgrounds, from different regions across the country and indeed across the globe. However, academic understandings and activist efforts have often failed to take adequate note of these differences.

Read and Respond

Questions about difference

There are various ways in which questions about differences between women have been expressed. These can take various reference-points: within countries, between countries. Some examples the debates that spring from differences are given below. Select one topic and try to find out more about it.

- Differences between women of different communities within India: e.g. religious

What are some of these differences?

Women belonging to different classes and communities have different life circumstances and different access to various sorts of resources. Women of different religious groups in India are governed by different personal laws (those pertaining to marriage and family). Women of different caste backgrounds also have different access to resources and face different forms of discrimination, and also different types of patriarchy. Women who have

various physical and mental disabilities have different problems of access than other women. The point to be taken into account is that women have different experiences and different life chances based upon where they are placed in various social locations and hierarchies.

It is important that these differences be taken into account, both within academic disciplines and also within the area of activism. This is because firstly, different groups of men and women have different experiences and are affected differently by similar processes, and these need to be understood and integrated into academic theories and concepts. Secondly, when interventions are planned, they need to reflect the specific circumstances of the people for whom they are planned. Therefore a detailed understanding of these specific circumstances is necessary, and it cannot simply be assumed that interventions that have been applied to one group of men or women will be appropriate for another.

What implications does the recognition of differences have upon academic disciplines? It cautions us against making careless generalisations, for example, by assuming that the experiences of one group of people are necessarily the same as those of all groups. It also makes us aware that the results of activist efforts in one area may have different consequences than in another, depending upon different circumstances. The experiences of different groups of women have also to be carefully drawn upon for theoretical and conceptual understandings of gender.

	<p>and caste.</p>	
<p>Read and Respond A Matter to Debate Over</p>	<p>• Differences between women from different countries. e.g. the First World and the Third World</p>	
<p>Topic: Women's Reservation Bill proposes to amend the Constitution of India to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha and in all State Legislative Assemblies for women. Should this Bill be passed?</p>	<p>• Differences between women of different races. e.g. the contributions made by women of colour in the United States of America</p>	
	<p>Divide the class into two groups and conduct a debate session with leader of each group debating 'for' or 'against' the motion.</p>	

Unit End Comprehension

1. Discuss the latest developments related to Gender Studies in Indian context and critically analyse the role of government agencies in it.
2. Tracing the women's movement across the world, comment on its influence on Indian society.
3. Discuss different perspectives and positions in Gender studies.
4. What are the basic assumptions on which some of the feminist movements are based? How do you place them in Indian context?
5. Describe the relevance and need for gender studies in present scenario.
6. What are the focus areas of women studies elaborate with examples?
7. Explain different areas of gender studies.
8. Discuss how gender studies is visualised through historical lens in global context.