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## GENDER STUDIES : AN INTRODUCTION

Human society identifies people through various identity markers like sex, gender, caste, race, nationality, region, religion, and so on. A man who describes himself as young, Tamil, Brahmin, Indian, postgraduate is giving us various markers of identity that he carries as part of his being. Gender, in that sense, is one of these classifying principles as it helps to put people in different categories based on their sex at birth. Let us understand this with the help of the conversation given below:

Radha: I will stop coming to school next month.

Seema: Why? Why do you want to stop coming to school?

Radha: My father cannot earn enough to give education to all of us, and my brother needs the education to get a job. My mother also goes to work and needs my help doing housework with her and caring for my younger siblings.

Seema: But, through education, you can also get a good job and help your family.

Radha: Yes, but my parents have decided to marry me off in 3-4 years and I will not be able to help them after marriage.

This conversation between two young girls explains how different roles are assigned according to our gender. For example, Radha's education is neglected as the parents think about the boys as the future bread earner for the family. But household work is taken as the responsibility of female members of the household, like Radha and her mother. These different perceptions about males and females constitute the sex-gender system. For example, males are considered as physically stronger than females. Later in this module, we will question this simple understanding of sex as biological and gender as social.

Society has assigned different roles for boys and girls. There are certain things which boys perceive as boys' activities, but girls are not expected to do them. Dress codes are different for boys and girls. Their treatment in the family and society is also different. This lesson is going to provide you the scope to understand role of women's movement in emergence of Gender Studies as a discipline. The lesson will also help you to comprehend the relationship of Gender studies with other discipline.

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**OUTCOMES**

After studying this lesson, learner:

- explains the role of women's movements in the emergence of gender Studies
- describes Gender Studies as a discipline
- describes the need and rationale for the study of Gender Studies
- explains the interdisciplinary approach to Gender Studies as a body of knowledge

**1.1 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND GENDER STUDIES**

**1.1.1 The background**

The history of Gender Studies as a discipline is contextualised in the various women's movements that emerged in European countries and the United States of America (USA) during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These movements helped in raising awareness about women's views and concerns. In the USA, the women's movement in modern times started with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, focusing on social, civil and religious conditions and the women's rights.

**1.1.2 Beginning of women's right to vote**



**DO YOU KNOW?**

Wyoming was the first territory or state in America to grant women suffrage in the 1869. Louisa Ann Swain was the first woman in the United States to vote in a general election on September 6, 1870, in Laramie, Wyoming. After a few decades, Finland granted voting rights to women in 1906, Norway in 1912, Great Britain in 1928, Spain in 1931 and France in 1945.

The second phase of the women's movement in western countries started in 1960s with struggles around equality in education, employment opportunities, and reproductive rights. Finally, the third wave began in the 1990s with a focus on issues of violence against women, autonomy and equal opportunities.

**1.1.3 Women's movement in India: The early years**

The women's movement in India took off in the 1920s, building on the 19th century social reform movements. The major achievements of the social reform movement were:



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- Abolition of *Sati* in 1829
- Enabling widow remarriage in 1856.
- Fight against gender-based discrimination by women like Rassundari Devi, Pandita Ramabai.

Social Reform Movement in India In the 19th century, one sees the emergence of a number of reform movements. Some of these were

- Abolition of Sati
- Prohibition of Child Marriage
- Widow Remarriage
- Education of Women



**ACTIVITY 1.1**

Can you identify the social reformers associated with these movements?

Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi, Tarabai Shinde, Haimavati Sen and Saraladevi.

Some of the important women's associations involved included the Women's Indian Association (1917), the National Council of Indian Women (1925) and the All-India Women's Conference (1927). This phase lost momentum with Independence in 1947 as the Constitution of India guaranteed formal equality to women. This was the time when the spirit of nationalism was very high and there was a belief that the ideals of democracy and equality would automatically address gender inequality.

**1.1.4 Women's movement in post-independent India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

A report by a Committee on the Status of Women in 1974 highlighted the inequality and discrimination faced by women in India. The feminists in the 1970s thus once again mobilised the feminist movement in India. There were protests by women against rising prices, violence, gender discrimination, liquor prohibition, and environmental issues. These women came from different castes, classes, communities, and rural and urban backgrounds. It put women's issues back onto the centre stage of national politics. The 1980s saw huge mobilisation against rape cases and dowry deaths. These struggles resulted in some legal reforms like the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and further amendments in dowry prohibition rules in the form of The Dowry Prohibition (Maintenance of Lists of Presents to the Bride and Bridegroom) Rules in 1985., amendments in the Indian Penal Code to modify provisions related to rape in 1983 and 2013.

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### Some Tribal Women Leaders

Tribal history has seen many brave women from indigenous communities. Even though there is a great diversity in tribal communities across India and their feminist movements are diverse nevertheless they are similar in their ideology. These women have made a mark in society and have influenced countless women. Some of these are as follows:

- Rani Durgavati Wasa ruler of the Gondwana kingdom and fought against the Mughals.
- Rani Gaidinliu from Nagaland fought against the British.
- Rani Chennamma from Kittur again fought against colonial rule.
- Other tribal women leaders include Sayani Barla, Kuni Sikala, Jamuan Tudu, Neidonuo Angami and Soni Sori.
- We are all familiar with sportswomen like Dutee Chand, Mary Kom and Dangmei Grace.
- Tulasi Munda from Odisha was awarded a Padmashri for her work on education for tribal children.
- Padmashri Tadisaru Bai is a poetess from Odisha and has over 50,000 devotional songs in Odia, Kui and Sanskrit.

The contemporary movement in women's struggle for equality is connected with the larger political and economic contexts at both national and international levels. Communalism, caste-based politics, and the impact of globalisation, have thrown up new challenges. The challenges are from women from minority communities, Dalit women and women from the North-East and other women whose voices could not be represented within and by the earlier women's movement. They challenged the upper class and caste bias of the women's movement. This led to movements like the Dalit women's movement- Dalit Mahila Samiti in Uttar Pradesh.

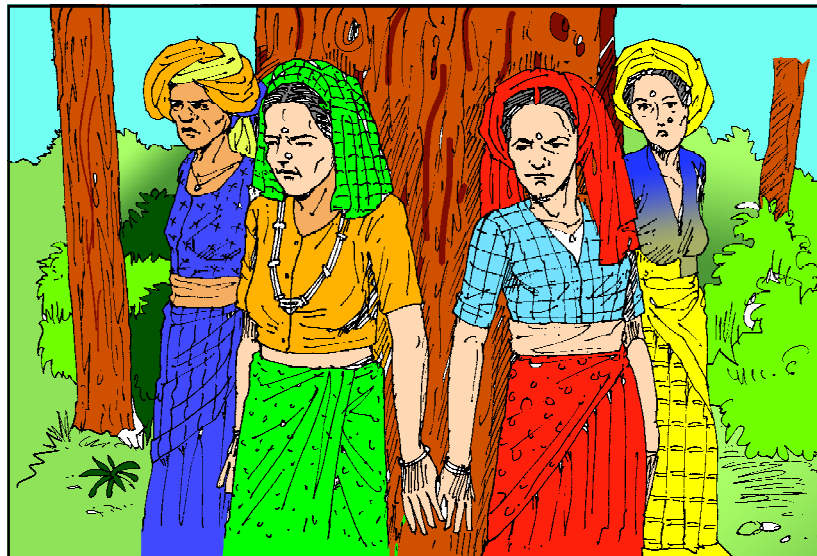


Fig: 1.1 Participation of Women in Chipko Movement




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### INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.1

1. Where did women initially get the right to vote?
2. What was the focus of the Women's movement in the early phase?
3. Why did the women's movement restart in the 1970s?



### ACTIVITY 1.2

Identify the various tribes in India. Also, list at least one-woman achiever from each of the tribes. This could be a woman from the present times too.

## 1.2 GENDER STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE

### 1.2.1 The beginnings

The women's movement discussed briefly in the above section was directed at questioning women's continued subordination, exploitation and oppression in a male-dominated world and fighting to establish a more equal and just society. The struggle for equality also reached universities and other educational institutions, where feminist scholars started questioning the existing patriarchal frameworks through various subject areas or disciplines in the universities. When we look at the history of various disciplines like Sociology, Economics, Political Science, History, it is not difficult to conclude that the key thinkers of these disciplines are men, and they brought a gender-neutral or gender-blind perspective to the study of their disciplines which did not include women. Women were neither there as the creators of the disciplinary knowledge nor as the subjects of these disciplines.



### DO YOU KNOW?

**Father** of economics is Adam Smith

**Father** of History is Herodotus

**Father** of Political Science is Aristotle

**Father** of Sociology is August Comte

There are no 'Mothers' of any discipline. This in itself highlights the male centric bias in many disciplines.

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**ACTIVITY 1.3**

Can you identify some women scholars of the 17th and 18th centuries?

These movements had a huge impact on the academic world and resulted in the emergence of Women's Studies as an area of research and teaching in the US in the 1960s. Feminist scholars started addressing the absence of women in their respective disciplines.

Gradually, many critical thinkers pointed out that disciplines will have to change their perspectives and acknowledge that leaving out women or any other marginalised social group will not only result in our knowledge being biased and incomplete but would also keep women in a marginalised position till this gap is addressed. These criticisms not only questioned the frameworks in place but also provided a new and inclusive framework, thus contributing to the growth of the disciplines by including women and their issues.

For example, feminist historians started questioning why History was more about men. It was through stories of wars, conquest, trade relations, or managing the empire, among others. Women were mostly absent in these stories or were mentioned occasionally and/or briefly. Feminist scholars first made attempts to make women visible by highlighting their lives and conditions as subjects of human history.

### 1.2.2 Gender Studies in India

In India, Women's Studies as an area of study took root during the 1970s with the establishment of the first Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS) in 1974 at the SNDT University, Mumbai. The Centre was to undertake research, teaching, documentation, publication and community outreach activities aimed at gender equity. The RCWS soon became the model adopted by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi to develop Women's Studies Centres in Indian universities.

Starting with struggles by feminist scholars within disciplinary frameworks, these interventions helped to strengthen the relatively new area of Women Studies where the focus was on the evaluation of the existing position of women in the social, economic, political and religious context.

The studies made under the area of women's studies not only developed critiques of gender blindness of various disciplines but also proved complementary by opening up areas of research which were till then not taken up for study.

Another important feature of the Women's Studies centres and courses was that strong links to women's movements, activism, feminist ideas and practices were maintained. It was the coming together of theory and practice to change the world in a positive way.



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Gradually, it was realised that studying merely about women and their concerns and issues would also be incomplete and biased if their relations with men are not taken up as part of the framework. Women's Studies framework thus appeared to be inadequate in addressing new issues and research questions that were being raised. Thus, a new area, known as Gender Studies, started taking shape. The term 'Gender Studies' is more inclusive, accommodating men, masculinity and other sexual minorities. However, defining it as a discipline such as History, Economics, or Political Science is difficult. As a result, some people see it only as an area of study rather than an autonomous discipline.

### 1.2.3 How Gender Studies is a discipline

Gender Studies is a significant area of inquiry today, which is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary at the same time. It is not limited to any one discipline or subject in particular. It yet establishes a connection with and between all disciplines, as this area of Gender Studies is about life itself.

The initial attempts by feminists at theorising women's subordination included making a distinction between sex and gender because biological differences between men and women have been cited to justify the subordination of women. These differences were explained as natural, and hence it was not possible to change them. Feminist theorists tried to prove that while sex is natural, gender and the roles associated with each gender are assigned by a particular society in a given time period. Hence, these can be changed over a period of time.

Many anthropological studies support that masculine and feminine behaviours differ in different societies at different periods. In India, Veena Poonacha has studied Coorgi women in Karnataka and how actively they cultivated land and even hunted in pre-modern times. Gender roles can thus be learned as well as unlearned. Cooking at home in Indian society is still seen as a woman's job but men can do it equally well, we just have to learn it. Similarly, girls can play with guns and cars and boys can play with dolls and kitchen sets to unlearn rigid gender roles learned through socialisation. Feminists like Alisan Jaggar have now questioned the difference between sex and gender, as even biology gets affected by social norms. If women are encouraged to have slender bodies, according to prevalent beauty norms, it is also because dietary prescriptions are different for each gender. Male and female bodies are thus also a product of culture.

Gender Studies, as a discipline, helps understand the workings of gender in various settings. This field includes Studies (Focussing on women, feminism, gender, and politics), Studies, and Studies. It draws on knowledge from the humanities, social sciences, medicine, and natural sciences.

We have gendered the whole world around us. In Indian society, even in contemporary times, behavioural traits like bravery, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, and physical strength

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are related to masculinity. On the other hand, patience, sentimentality, and nurturing are seen as feminine qualities. These understandings of masculine and feminine influence not just our ideas but also the material products we use in everyday life ranging from clothes and computer designs to the images of gods, goddesses and mythology. Over time these distinctions become so much a part of ourselves that we start calling these understandings ‘natural’ and hence unchangeable. It is this ‘naturalness’ that Gender Studies attempts to question.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.2**

1. What roles do classifying principles like gender play?
2. What is the subject of inquiry for Gender Studies?
3. Are gender roles natural?

**1.3 RATIONALE OF GENDER STUDIES**

The idea of bringing Gender Studies to school curriculum has been discussed and worked upon for quite some time, and the National Education Policy of 1986 saw education as “an agent of basic change in the status of women”. It thus argued for an interventionist role by the National Education System in the empowerment of women. The increased cases of sexual violence in the recent past have made it imperative to introduce Gender Studies as part of the school curriculum. The course is trying to reach out to young people through education in order to work towards a more gender-just society. The education system, in close interaction with other stakeholders, is facing the challenge of keeping itself updated with the concerns of young people so that they are better informed and accordingly make informed choices in their lives. Gender, one of the primary classifying principles in society, assumes significance in this endeavour of the state and other agencies. As the twin forces of modernisation and globalisation have brought in development and social change, girls and women are becoming more visible in the public sphere, be it educational institutions, public transport, offices, or other public spaces. The nature of these places has changed. This change has brought into light new concerns like how to make these spaces safe for all. It is not just about women but also for men and transgender, transsexuals, sexual minorities and people from other marginalised social groups.

Since this course will focus on gender inequalities and related issues, you will learn about the workings of gender on a social, cultural and psychological level and help you learn to use the gender perspective in studying other disciplines. Learning about some key concepts and debates of Gender Studies will open up areas of discussion which can help you develop greater gender awareness and sensitisation. It will also help you understand and appreciate the diversity of gendered experiences and perspectives among human beings. As a learner, you will also





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realise that gender roles are not fixed and are different in a given society at different times and different across cultures and affect every facet of society. You would be learning about key terms and concepts such as sex, gender, sexuality, embodiment, masculinity, other genders, feminism(s), patriarchy (ies), sexism, and systems of oppression. It will give learners the opportunity to be self-reflective. Introducing Gender Studies will develop analytical and critical thinking skills, and help teachers and learners in creating an equitable classroom environment. It can train learners to recognise and challenge harassment in the classroom and workplace. A better understanding of the classroom's diversity will help learners treat others with respect.

Gender role stereotypes are continuously being reproduced by various sites and agencies like family, law, media, educational system, medicine and popular culture among others. It will require interventions at far greater levels to challenge, minimise and/or eliminate stereotypical perceptions and actions towards the 'other' gender(s). By questioning these stereotypes, the learners will learn to accept and support the career and life choices made by peers, even if they may challenge gender role stereotypes like a boy will not be laughed at for declaring that he wanted to become a chef and neither will a girl be laughed at for expressing her desire to be a fighter plane pilot! You would also learn to stand up for somebody who challenges gender stereotypes. You will be able to develop independent thinking regarding culturally standardised gender roles.



#### INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.3

1. Explain the main objective of introducing Gender Studies in the school curriculum?
2. Name the term used for describing differential treatment based on one's sex?

### 1.4 INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Gender Studies teaches learners to critically reflect on how knowledge is produced, to ask new questions, to open up new areas of study and research, and not restrict their role to learning theory. The learners also put their questions and knowledge into practice by bringing their gendered life experiences to the classroom. Then, they take this critical but valuable perspective to other disciplines. For example, a student of History can ask why women are missing from the History texts; a student of literature can ask why women writers were few in earlier times and could get their work published if they wrote under a pen-name of a man only; and so on. Different disciplines have started integrating gender perspectives but sometimes differ in their approaches to how and why they study gender.

Gender Studies, as an interdisciplinary field, focuses on the multiple interactions of gender with other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and religion. The interdisciplinary study emerged in response to the incomplete answers to social problems provided by the

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disciplines. It was realised that rather than working in water-tight compartments in the name of disciplinary boundaries, reaching out to other disciplines to make learning more meaningful for social transformation will be better. This borrowing between and among disciplines was vertical and horizontal and essential for developing a critical field like Gender Studies. The following sections briefly discuss the relationship between different disciplines and Gender Studies.

#### 1.4.1 Education and Gender Studies

There is a close relationship between Gender Studies and Education. Gender Studies help learners to critically reflect on knowledge formation, ask new questions and open up new areas of learning and skill development. The learners also put their questions and knowledge into practice by bringing their life experiences to the classroom. A child's experiences within the school and the classroom create a deep image of 'gendered identities'. They understand the implications of social expectations based on the roles assigned to each 'sex'. This is because school acts as the primary socialising agency for the child. Many Studies have pointed out that certain textbooks portraying negative images of girls or women, or writing about them in only stereotypical ways, normalises gender discrimination that they experience in their everyday interaction and has a lasting impact on their young minds. Hence, education and Gender Studies are closely interwoven, and conscious changes in curriculum and pedagogy can help introduce learners to the values of gender equality. The learners can then take this critical but valuable perspective to other disciplines.

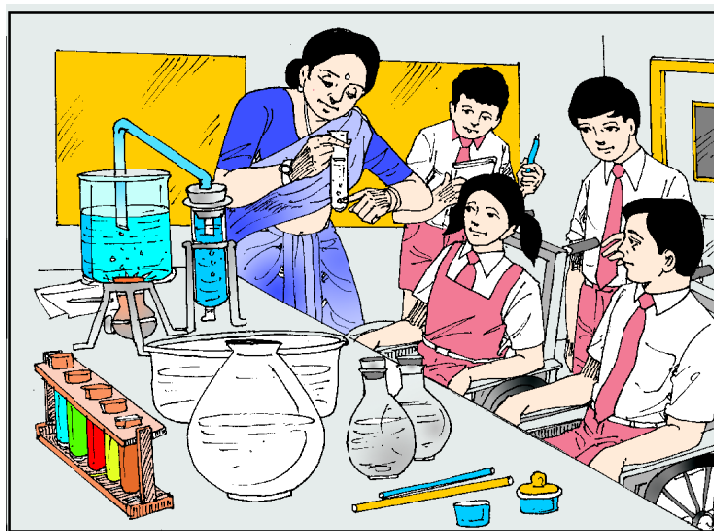


Fig: 1.2 Learners attending science practical session

#### 1.4.2 Economics and Gender Studies

Similarly, Gender Studies and Economics also have a close relationship. Gender role stereotypes usually define the responsibilities that 'men' and 'women' have. For example, domestic work,



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including child rearing, was considered women's work while men were seen as bread earners of the family. When feminist scholars started questioning the conventional understanding of Economics, attention was diverted to the nature and value of housework and women were seen as producers and not just consumers of the family. Women paid and unpaid work was gradually recognized, changing our understanding of the concept of work itself. It also helped in bringing women into the policy framework of governments and employers.



Fig: 1.3 Women in a Tribal Market

### 1.4.3. Political Science and Gender Studies

Another discipline that has benefitted from Gender Studies is Political Science. It had been a male-dominated discipline with key thinkers being men, and their theories have also been male-centric. Feminist thinkers like Carole Pateman have questioned the basic premises of the social contract theory of the origin of a state as it did not theorise how women came to be a part of civil society. Political theory needs to focus on including women in its imagination of concepts like citizenship, nation, politics and development. Political parties worldwide are becoming conscious of women and trying to include gender issues in their manifestoes. In India, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments, which gave 1/3<sup>rd</sup> representation to women in rural and urban local self-government, has been a huge step in ensuring women's political participation and empowerment. Appointment of Shrimati Draupadi Murmu as 15th President of India, the world's largest democracy is a part of Saga of women's empowerment. She is the first tribal person and second woman to serve as President of India. The Women's Reservation Bill for ensuring greater participation at the parliamentary level is still pending and may be enacted soon. Despite having a woman Prime Minister in Indira Gandhi and many women as Chief

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Ministers in various states, we still have a long way to go to ensure gender parity in political participation.

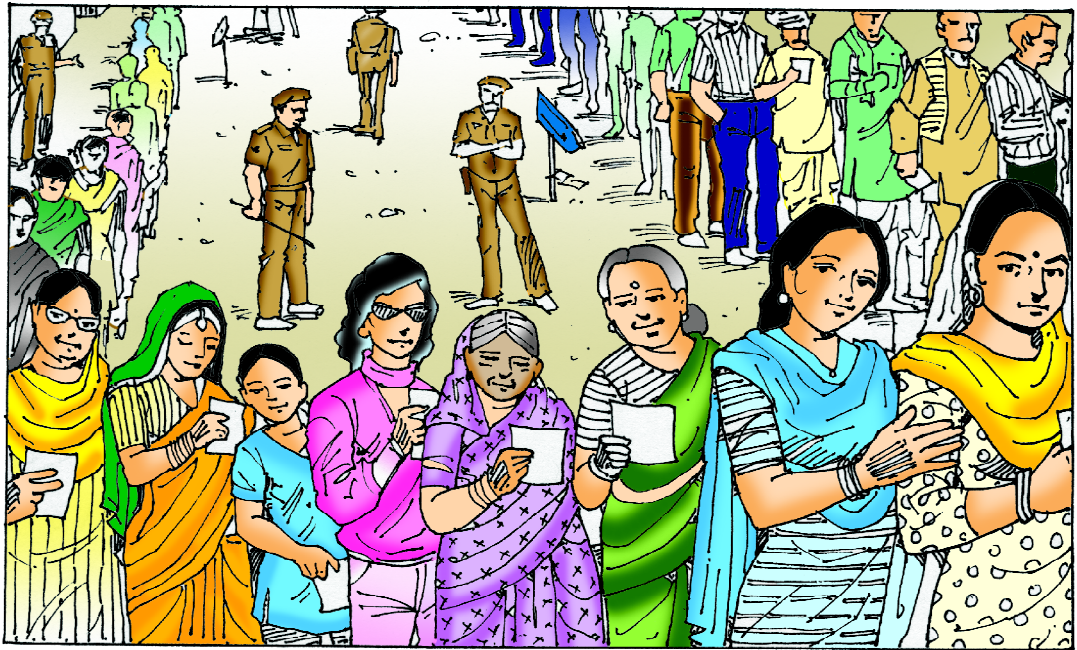


Fig: 1.4 Increase in Participation of Women in Politics

### 1.5 GENDER AND EVERYDAY LIFE

The Interdisciplinary nature of the study is evident as it opens new paths of inquiry and offers fresh approaches to many key issues. The important role played by the difference between sex and gender, biological determinism or sexism to establish and question women's subordination has already been discussed. The questioning of gender inequality through various disciplines has helped in drawing attention to crucial issues from a gender-sensitive perspective. The social construction of masculinity and femininity has helped in understanding the power dynamics at work in gender relations. The struggles for sexual and reproductive rights have helped in raising awareness around questions of choice, consent, violence, abortion rights, and discrimination inherent in social arrangements and institutions like marriage, caste and religion, among others. Gender Studies has helped in questioning the notions of an ideal body. For example, advertisements that promote fairness creams, sell appliances to help women become better homemakers, encourage men to provide all facilities to their families by making good financial decisions and buying the right insurance policy and so on. These stereotypes are continuously being challenged by ordinary men and women in contemporary times and the division of work between the genders is getting blurred due to various factors like better education and employment opportunities for women, growing number of nuclear families, exposure to more egalitarian cultures through globalised media and improved and accessible means of transport, supportive policies by government and employers. These changes in our



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everyday lives indicate social change, and we need a conscious move towards a gender-just society. Integration of a gender-sensitive perspective in curricula, content and pedagogy is thus important to make education and educational spaces more gender inclusive. This is what this course aims to do.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.4**

1. How is Gender Studies interdisciplinary?
2. What is the relationship between Gender Studies and Economics?
3. How do Gender Studies help a person in their everyday life?



**DO YOU KNOW?**

1. Why Women's Day

International women's day is celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> of March every year. It shows that society respects and accepts women's role as equal partners.

**Glossary:**

Biological determinism – The belief that human behaviour is governed by biology and social environment has no role to play in it. It is used to justify the differential treatment of males and females.

Feminism – The belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes; it opposes any discrimination based on sex or gender.

Patriarchy – A social and political system based on male domination over women and younger or marginalised men where inheritance is through the male line. Men hold political power and define social, political, economic and religious norms, formally and informally.

Sexism – Biases, prejudices, discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of sex or gender, usually directed at women and girls.

Sexual division of labour – Work is assigned on the basis of one's gender like women are better at cooking and men are better at driving.

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**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

In human society, people are identified by different indicators like sex, caste, religion, build, race and nationality. Sex is one of the most important indicators. Sex and Gender are different. Sex is biological whereas gender is a specific set of meaning assigned to a particular sex society. Sex cannot be changed, but gender can be changed.

Various women's movements raised awareness about the discrimination between men and women. As a result, countries like USA and UK granted the right to vote to women. In India, women have the right to vote. Moreover, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments ensured 33% reserved seats for women's political participation in local governance.

This course on Gender Studies is interdisciplinary and linked with history, political science and economics. Its study as a discipline established the need for society based on equality.



**ACTIVITY**

1. Interview your family members about their understanding of gender roles. Do you think they always behave according to the ideal which they describe?
2. Try to find out about gender role expectations in other communities. Are they different from those of your community?
3. Do you change your actions and activities when you are in the presence of the other gender? How and why?
4. From the list of jobs below, tell which occupation is for male, female or both. Try to think why a person from a particular gender is preferred for some of these jobs, and will it be a problem if a person from the other gender also starts doing it?

Construction Worker

Flight Attendant

Social Worker

Secretary

Elementary Teacher

Hair Stylist

Model



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Store Clerk

Veterinarian

Physical Education Teacher

Cook

Photographer

Nurse

Computer Analyst



**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Why Gender Studies is an important discipline? Support your answer with arguments.
2. Name any five occupations which were taken as Male occupations. Have women replaced men in each of their occupations? Give examples.
3. Do you agree that men and women have equal participation in all jobs? Support your answer with examples.



**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

**1.1**

1. Wyoming was the first territory or state in America to grant women suffrage in 1869. Louisa Ann Swain was the first woman in the United States to vote in a general election on September 6, 1870, in Laramie, Wyoming. After a few decades, Finland granted voting rights to women in 1906, Norway in 1912, Great Britain in 1928, Spain in 1931 and France in 1945.
2. The women's movement in India took off in the 1920s, building on the 19th century social reform movements (See Box 1.1). The major achievements of the social reform movement were:
  - Abolition of Sati in 1829
  - Enabling widow remarriage in 1856.
3. A report by a Committee on the Status of Women in 1974 highlighted the inequality and discrimination faced by women in India. The feminists in the 1970s thus once again mobilised the feminist movement in India.

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**1.2**

1. They are used to give different identities to people, and accordingly, their status in society gets defined. Men and women have different roles in society
2. Gender Studies focuses on the working on gender relations in various settings.
3. No gender roles are socially constructed.

**1.3**

1. The main objective is to work towards establishing a gender-just society
2. Sexism is the term used to describe differential treatment based on one's sex.

**1.4**

1. Interdisciplinary Gender Studies emerged in response to the incomplete answers to social problems provided by the disciplines. Gender Studies helps a learner develop a critical perspective that can be applied to other disciplines. For example, a student of History can ask why women are missing from the History texts; a student of literature can ask why women writers were few in earlier times and they could get their work published if they wrote under pen-name of a man only; and so on.
2. Gender Studies and Economics also have a close relationship. When feminist scholars started questioning the conventional understanding of Economics, attention was diverted to the nature and value of housework. Women were seen as producers and not just consumers of the family. Women's paid and unpaid work was gradually recognized, changing our understanding of the concept of work itself. It also helped in bringing women into the policy framework of governments and employers.
3. Gender Studies teaches learners to critically reflect on how knowledge is produced, to ask new questions, to open up new areas of study and research, and not restrict their role to learning theory. The learners also put questions and their knowledge into practice by bringing their gendered life experiences to the classroom.