

Q How do you differentiate the discipline of Gender studies from that of women studies? Historically, trace the need for the establishment of Gender studies as a distinct discipline and its scope and significance with special reference to Pakistan?

### 1) Introduction:

The study of women and the various dimensions that surround their existence in a society became extremely important when women themselves started questioning the lack of equality that was prevalent in the world at large. Discrimination against women was observed to be present in all aspects of life and the need to study this phenomenon led to the birth of a discipline called women studies. A few years later, however, this discipline was replaced by that of Gender studies. Gender studies was thought to have a broader scope as compared to women studies. In Pakistan as well, there is great need to study the complexities of society that propagate women disempowerment and subjugation.

## 2) Difference Between Gender studies and Women studies:

Gender studies	Women studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Broader concept, Approach is multi-disciplinary</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Narrow concept, Focus only on women</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on the social construction of gender role</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on elimination of patriarchy</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on how gender plays a role in each and every aspect of life.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• History and literature interpreted to understand inequality regarding women</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• product of third wave of Feminism</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• product of Second wave of Feminism</li></ul>

### a) Narrow vs. Broad concept:

Women studies as a discipline focused solely upon women and their problems. It studied the society through the lens of women and how historically women had faced discrimination in all aspects of life. Gender studies on the other hand took into account not just women, but all genders in a society. It used various disciplines such as biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology etc., to study gender roles assigned to various genders in a society.

### b) Only women vs. All Genders and sexualities:

Women studies ignored all other genders and

focused entirely upon women. Such a thing as the third sex had no place in the women studies discipline. Gender studies on the other hand focused on every gender and forms of sexuality. This included male, female, lesbians, gays, bisexual, transsexual and queer. Gender studies was the first discipline to address the issues of the LGBTQ community.

c) Elimination of patriarchy vs. Social construction of Gender Roles:

Women studies believed that the solution to the problems that women faced lies in the elimination of patriarchy from our society. This discipline believes that only by the elimination of a mindset that promotes male superiority can women overcome the problems that they face. Gender studies on the other hand delves and believes that the problem lies in the way gender is constructed in a society. The discrimination that women face is because of the way society has defined their role according to the concept of femininity.

d) Interpretation with a focus on women vs. Interpretation with focus on every aspect:  
Women studies focused upon an understanding

of history and literature through the lens of women only. It tried to outline how historical representation of women in literature had ensured a culture of discrimination against women. Gender studies on the other hand focused upon not just women, but all genders and how discrimination occurred due to flawed understanding of gender roles in all aspects of life. As Simon de Beauvoir says: "one is not born a woman, one becomes one."

e) Second wave vs. Third wave:

The discipline women studies emerged as a result of the second wave of feminism. It was created in order to sensitize people about the status of women in society. At this time not much importance was given to other genders. However, with the third wave of feminism the focus of discourse shifted from being solely about women to being about all genders. This led to the formation of gender studies.

d) **Historical Development of Gender Studies as a Discipline:**

The introduction of gender studies as a discipline was mainly to address the

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Shortcomings of Women studies. As awareness regarding the fluidity of gender was taking hold and so different approach towards studying gender dynamics in society was needed.

a) Third wave of Feminism - from Binary vision of Gender to a more fluid concept:

Rather than perceiving people as either male or female, Third wave of Feminism brought other possibilities to the fore. People grew more and more aware of a possibility to study gender as a fluid concept and not a binary concept.

A famous feminist, Judith Butler says:

"I am much more open about my categories of gender and my feminism has been about women's safety from violence, increased literacy, decreased poverty and more equality."

b) LGBT Movement:

This movement was started to fight for the rights of people who did not associate themselves with the sexual definitions of male and female. Thus, a new category was formed where lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders were taken into consideration. The study of these categories became a part

of gender studies as well

### c) Emergence of Queer studies and Queer Theory:

Queer Theory emerged in early 1990s as a field dedicated towards studying those people who do not associate with the four forms of sexuality as defined by LGBT. This was elaborated upon by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Tendencies* and by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. This concept had not been addressed in women studies and so was an important reason as to why Gender studies came into being.

### d) University programs shifting from women studies to Gender studies:

Various universities which had previously hosted departments of women studies started shifting towards Gender studies during the Third wave of Feminism. Indiana University was one such university which changed its program from women studies to Gender studies to reflect the inclusion of other genders in the study. Similarly, the University of Victoria in Canada changed its Women's studies Department to the Department of Gender Studies in 2016, and the list goes on.

## Scope and significance with Reference to Pakistan:

In Pakistan, the importance of a discipline such as Gender studies is heightened due to the cultural, religious and intellectual stigmas attached to women's participation in the public sphere of life.

a) Importance of Gender studies in understanding social construction of Gender binaries:

Gender came to be understood as more of a sociological term than a biological form of differentiating between people. The society dictates how a female and male should behave. Deviation from these behaviors results in censure from the society. In Pakistan as well, the society is hugely responsible for shaping the femininity and the masculinity of individuals. Thus, Gender studies has the potential to deconstruct the rigid structures that dictate female and male lives in Pakistan.

b) Using Gender studies to understand the patriarchal aspects of Pakistani society, Gender studies can be of immense help when it comes to understanding why

1) Pakistan's society gives supremacy to males at the cost of other gender. Since Gender Studies is a multi-disciplinary field, it can help to understand various aspects of society using religious, social, cultural, psychological, economic, political lens. This will in turn help to create awareness among the people of Pakistan and can also help to eradicate the social constructs that discriminate against women and other gender.

c) Understanding the plight of marginalized Eunuch community of Pakistan through Gender Gen. studies:

in Pakistan, the eunuch community is subjected to various forms of harassment and discrimination simply because they do not adhere to the gender of either male or female. These people are not given jobs and are reduced to demeaning professions such as dancing for entertainment or becoming sex workers. Gender studies helps to create awareness about these people under the Queer Theory and shows how in the Third wave of Feminism people started realizing that genders besides that of male and female exists. It enforced the need to provide this community with equal rights.



## b) Understanding Foeticide in Pakistan using Gender Studies:

Pakistan is among the South Asian countries where foeticide is a common happening. The most common reason behind terminating a pregnancy in Pakistan is the desire to have a male offspring.

The preference of male over female babies has been known, especially in rural areas of Pakistan, to cause people to either abort the pregnancy or to abandon their female babies. The Population Research Institute, a non-profit research group, released some worrying statistics: of the 24 million sex-selective abortions performed during 2000-2014 across the world, more than 1.2 million were estimated to have been carried out in Pakistan.

## c) Women's Subjugation in Pakistan and Gender Studies' Role in creating awareness:

In Pakistan, women are expected to limit their activities to the private sphere while the public sphere is deemed to be the domain of men. For this reason, barriers such as glass ceiling are put in place to hinder a woman's role

In the country's economy, Gender Studies is a useful tool in understanding the obvious and subtle forms of discrimination against women in Pakistan.

### 5) Conclusion:

In conclusion, there are a number of differences between women studies and Gender studies and the shift from women to Gender studies was propelled by the need to study genders other than women as well. This became obvious during the third wave of Feminism and by the formation of Queer Theory. In Pakistan, a discipline such as Gender studies is extremely significant in light of the various forms of discrimination that takes place against not just women but other genders as well.