

Write a note on the status of gender studies in Pakistan. Give your views on autonomy vs integration debate in gender studies. (2023)

INTRODUCTION

The status of gender studies in Pakistan can be traced back to 1989 when the Ministry of Women's Development was created to integrate gender norms into national development policies. Under this committee, Curriculum Revision Committee and CEWS were created. These institutes, later on, launched bachelors, masters, and PHD programs in gender studies. Several research institutes like PAWS and IWDS were created in 1990s to facilitate interdisciplinary research. These institutions led to the development of various policies, legal reforms, NGOs, media representation of gender issues. The autonomy proponents argued to keep gender studies as an independent discipline to ensure its uniqueness. However, the integration proponents argue to incorporate gender studies into the mainstream disciplines and built upon the existing knowledge. Some of the possible solutions to this debate include curricular flexibility, ^{use of} inclusive language and terminology, and bridge-building initiatives between both.

STATUS OF GENDER STUDIES IN PAKISTAN

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1989

Ministry of Women's Development

To integrate gender concerns into national development policies.

Formulated National Policy for the Development and Empowerment of Women (2010)

Curriculum Revision Committee

Aimed to eliminate gender biases in educational material

Promote gender-sensitive education

Center of Excellence for Women's Studies (CEWS)

Launched Bachelor, Master, PHD programs in gender studies at University of Karachi

1991	
Pakistan Association for Women Studies (PAWS)	
To facilitate interdisciplinary research on women issues.	
	1996
	Institute of Women Development Studies (IWDS)
	To conduct research on the socio-economic and political development of women in Pakistan.
First MA in Women Studies	
At the University of Karachi	
1997	
Gender Studies Department at Allama Iqbal Open University	
Provide accessible education on gender issues through distance learning	
	1998
	National Action Plan
	Establish comprehensive framework to combat gender-based violence

2000

National Commission on the Status of Women

To monitor, evaluate, and advocate for women rights
Played a role in passing of Protection of Women Act (2006), Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2010)

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CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Expansion of Gender Studies Programs

After the earlier establishment of gender studies department, several universities across Pakistan launched programs offering undergraduate, postgraduate, doctorate degrees in gender studies. These institutions include Quaid-e-Azam University, Fatima Jinnah Women University, University of Punjab, University of Management and Technology, and many more.

2. Policies and Legal Reforms

Gender studies academics have been instrumental in advocating for gender-sensitive policies and national conversations leading to legal reforms. Some of the prominent

- legal reforms and policies include:
- a) **Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2010)**
Legal framework to address harassment at workplace, ensuring safer working environment
 - b) **Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, (2012)**
Legal recourse for victims of domestic violence.
 - c) **Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2011)**
Harsher punishments for acid attacks
 - d) **Elections Act (2017)**
Mandatory for political parties to allocate at least 5% of their tickets to women.
 - e) **Transgender Persons Act (2018)**
Legal recognition of Transgender individuals
 - f) **Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) 2008**
Safety net program for women in impoverished households.

3. Punjab Commission on Status of Women (PCWS), 2014

It was established to monitor and implement gender laws at provincial level. It visions a Punjab where women are equal, empowered and prosperous citizens. It aims to promote women empowerment through research, revision, and review of laws, policies, programs, rules and regulations.

4. Research Journals Development

Gender Studies scholars and institutions have increased their research in gender related issues including gender-based violence, political representation, women labor rights, and more. Some of the notable gender studies research journals include :-

a) Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies

Established by CEWS, University of Karachi, it publishes interdisciplinary research on gender issues in Pakistan.

Pakistan
b) →

Journal of Women Studies: Aalm-e-Niswan

Established by Pakistan Association for Women's Studies (PAWS), it covers critical issues related to women study and gender equality in Pakistan.

5. Gender Studies in Media and Pop Culture

Gender studies scholars engage with media organisations to provide expert commentary on women issues and to advocate for responsible gender representation in TV dramas, films, and news outlets. Several Pakistani dramas and films have brought gender issues into public spotlight. Some include :-

- a) **Udaari (2016)** Women (child) sexual abuse
- b) **Ek Thi Mariyam (2016)** Women Empowerment

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- b) Bol (2011) Gender identity, infanticide
- c) Aakhir Kab Tak (2021) Domestic Abuse
- e) Sang-e-Moh (2022) women resilience
↳ Honor killings, Toxic Masculinity
- f) Churails (2020) Patriarchy
- g) Joyland (2022) Transgender Rights.

b. Emergence of Gender Focused NGOs and Activism

Gender studies scholars have also contributed in the emergence and development of several non-governmental organisations in Pakistan including Aurat Foundation, Rozan, War Against Rape, Shirkat Gah, Awaz-e-Niswan, Baidaire, and more. Gender studies scholars have also contributed to the activism for women and transgender rights through Aurat March and #MeToo Movement.

AUTONOMY DEBATE

The autonomy debate in gender studies emphasizes keeping gender studies discipline as an independent field of study in university and colleges. It also argues for the establishment of separate spaces where individuals can escape patriarchal oppression. It emphasizes self-determination, agency, and independence for women

and marginalised groups.

1. Creation of Separate Spaces

Women need separate spaces to escape patriarchal oppression and develop their own voice. Autonomy advocates for creation of distinct spaces where women can organise, theorise, and empower themselves.

These include women shelters and women-only organisations. Moreover, by establishing gender studies. The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organisation emphasised the necessity of autonomous spaces for women of color.

“ We realise that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. ”

(Combahee River Collective)

2. Preservation of Focus

Autonomous status of gender studies helps in the preservation of the focus of study.

Integration of gender studies with other disciplines can dilute its core objectives and focus leading towards overlooking of unique experiences and challenges of marginalised genders.

3. Clear Direction for Progress

Autonomy provides a clear direction for gender studies. It ensures that the field evolves with a focus on empowerment, advocacy, and specific issues faced by marginalised groups.

4. Developing Unique Theories and Methodologies

Autonomous status of gender studies will allow the development of unique theories and methodologies that are specifically designed to understand the complexities of gender issues.

Standpoint theorists claim that the social location of marginalised groups enables them to generate unique insights into how social relations work.

(Sandra Harding, Feminist)

5. Advantages of Autonomy

- a) It fosters a strong sense of community among scholars and activists.
- b) Provides a platform for critical knowledge production.
- c) Language and knowledge are gendered, and relying on integration could undermine the goals of women liberation movement. (Gloria Bowles)

6. Scholars advocating autonomy

- a) Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues for the autonomy of gender studies to maintain its critical focus on the social construction of gender and the performative aspects of gender identity.
- b) Adrienne Rich argues for the necessity of women-centered spaces for knowledge production and social change.

INTEGRATION

The integration debate in gender studies emphasizes the inclusion of gender studies in the mainstream disciplines. This debate is often associated with liberal feminists who seek to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality within existing systems rather than establishing separate ones.

1. Gender Equality can be achieved through equal participation

Integration advocates that gender equality can be achieved through active participation in mainstream structure, such as politics, economy, and education. They argue that by integrating gender perspectives

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into these fields, society can become more inclusive and equitable

2. Access to Mastered/Established Knowledge

The mainstream disciplines like political science, economics, philosophy, anthropology have already established theories, methodologies, and frameworks for understanding how the world works. By integrating gender studies into these disciplines, it can leverage existing expertise and build upon that knowledge.

Example

Feminist economists, by working within established economic frameworks, have influenced policies to recognise and address the economic contributions of unpaid labor which lead towards advocating for policies on paid parental leaves and monetisation of domestic labor.

3. Pragmatic and Logical Approach

Proponents argue that rather than focusing on purely theoretical concerns, integration engages directly with real-world issues and policy making processes. This helps in influencing public policies and creating change.

Example

Gender studies has taken pragmatic approach by working with health-care providers to improve maternal health policies.

Donna Haraway, a feminist scholar, argues that by incorporating gender perspectives into science and technology, they can challenge the claims of objectivity and promote socially responsible research.

4. Access to Resources and Support

Integration provides access to wider range of resources and support from existing academic and social institutions. The scholars can easily get institutional fundings, ^{built} research networks and policy platform that might otherwise be unavailable to a standalone gender studies discipline.

5. Scholars advocating Integration

a) Cynthia Enloe, an international relations scholar, emphasizes the importance of incorporating gender analysis into the study of global politics.

"To integrate gender analyses into everyday life means that we can never be complacent about women's

status, nor about men's status,
globally, locally, or in any settings."
(Cynthia Enloe)

- b) Micheal Kimmel, a sociologist known for his work on masculinity and gender studies, emphasizes the need to bring gender studies into mainstream to challenge traditional norms and expectations related to masculinity.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THIS DEBATE

1. Curricular Flexibility

Design curricula that offer flexibility for students and scholars to engage with gender studies in a way that aligns with their interests and goals. This might include both standalone gender studies programs and integrated courses.

2. Inclusive Language and Terminology

Promote the use of inclusive language and terminology within both autonomous and integrated approach which will help in

creating a shared vocabulary and understanding across disciplines.

3. Bridge-Building Initiatives

Support initiatives that aim to build bridges between gender studies and other disciplines. This can include workshops, seminars, or conferences that bring scholars together to share and explore common grounds and areas of mutual interest.

CONCLUSION

In the last three decades, Pakistan has seen significant development in the gender studies. This is evident through the policies and legal reforms that took place for the protection of women and marginalised groups. Gender activism has also taken a new form in the shape of Aurat Marches every year. Both the autonomous and integration school of thoughts can significantly help in the development of this discipline by working in close collaboration and bridging the gaps within each other.