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## Gender 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. (2019)

# INTRODUCTION

Gender studies is an established discipline across the world today. Its evolution can be traced back to the early 1700s when Mary Wollstonecraft published her book "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" which marked the initial point for women's entry into the academic spaces. It was followed by the waves of feminism which were successful in achieving significant success in the political, economic, and administrative domains. First women studies program started in 1970s in the San Diego State University. Gender studies as an academic discipline was required to understand the gender issues holistically, addressing the historical neglect, to construct gender inclusive policies through a research and action oriented approach. In Pakistan, it is significant to work on this discipline in order to challenge the patriarchal norms, combat gender stratification, deconstruct gender roles, promote gender inclusivity in education, and for overall women empowerment.

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# HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF GENDER STUDIES

1792  
'A Vindication of the Rights  
of Women' by Mary  
Wollstonecraft  
~~Initial~~ Initial point for  
women's official entry into  
communal, administrative  
and academic spaces.

1880-1890s  
First Wave of Feminism  
Suffragist Movement

1929  
'A Room of One's Own'  
by Virginia Woolf

1948  
Universal Declaration of  
Human Rights

1949  
'The Second Sex' by  
Simone de Beauvoir

1960  
Second Wave of Feminism

1963  
'The Feminine Mystique'  
by Betty Friedan

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1970

First Women Studies Program was founded at San Diego State University in USA

1974

Women Studies Quarterly was published  
First academic journal

1979

The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW

1986

National Women Studies Association (NWSA) in USA.

1994

The International Gender Studies Centre (IGSC) at University of Oxford

1995

Beijing Platform for Action

Realizing Gender Equality

2000

Millennial Development Goals  
MDG 3:- Promote gender equality and empower women

2017

Sustainable Development Goals SDG 5: Gender Equality

# NEED FOR GENDER STUDIES

~~1. Focus on Reason, Individual Rights, and Equality in the Enlightenment Era~~

1. Exclusion of Women from the Rational Ideas of Enlightenment Era

Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" critiqued the exclusion of women from the ideas of reason, individualism, and equality. She also criticised the philosophers like Rousseau who advocated for male individual rights and posited that women education should focus on subordination and pleasing men. The rise of gender studies is a response to the gaps left in the Enlightenment era.

2. The Industrial Revolution led to discussions about Women's Rights and their Status

The Industrial Revolution significantly changed the nature of women's work. Women entered factories which gave rise to discussions about their participation in workforce and

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their role in home. Friedrich Engels in his book "The Condition of the Working Class in England" commented that a working woman suffers doubly, once by the general burden of labour, and then by her duties in the family. Gender studies explores how this revolution led to wage disparities, labor rights, and separate spheres ideology. The Seneca Falls Convention (1848) was also a manifestation of these inequalities in the workforce.

### 3. Holistic Understanding of Gender Issues

Gender studies provides a holistic understanding of gender issues by analyzing the intersectionality of gender with race, class, sexuality, and culture. Kimberle' Crenshaw explains that the intersection of racism and sexism in Black women's lives cannot be captured by looking at race or gender alone. Chandra Talpade in the essay "Under Western Eyes" critiques how the Western feminists often universalise women's experiences. Thus, gender studies, as an academic discipline, provides a holistic understanding of gender issues through an integrated approach. (gender mainstreaming)

### 4. Addressing the Historical Neglect of Women's Contributions

Gender studies is needed to address the historical neglect of women's contributions to society and to reclaim their intellectual and cultural voices. Arienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" explains the necessity for women to rewrite their history and challenge the male-dominated narratives.

### 5. Gender inclusive Policy making and gender-sensitive

Gender studies contributes to the formation of gender inclusive and gender-sensitive policies that promote equality and fairness. Nancy Folbre, a feminist economist, explains how the economic contributions of women in caregiving roles have been historically overlooked. Gender studies research in the care economy will help in devising more gender-sensitive policies. At global level, CEDAW has been an essential gender-sensitive policy framework.

### 6. Adopting a Research and Action Oriented Approach

Along with theoretical research, gender studies also actively seeks to implement change through activism and advocacy. Sandra Harding in her book "Whose Science?"

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"Whose Knowledge" discusses how feminist research methodologies are structured to bring social change by combining critical analysis with practical solutions. Gender Studies scholars often use Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) that involves working with communities to identify problems and find solutions.

Michelle Fine used CBPR to address gender and race in education.

# SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER STUDIES

## 1. Challenges Patriarchal Norms

Pakistan has a deeply ingrained patriarchal system that places men in position of power and authority. Gender studies provides an in-depth examination of patriarchal norms, structures, and practices. It also highlights how these norms contribute to the marginalisation and oppression of women. Kamila Shami's novel "Burnt Shadows" and Tehmina Durrani's "My Feudal Lord" explore the impact of patriarchy on women's lives.

## 2. Combating Gender Stratification

In Pakistan, gender stratification is evident in various aspects of life including education, employment, political participation, and more. Gender studies provides tools for examining the structural inequalities that contribute to gender stratification and advocate for the policies and interventions that promote gender equality. Farida Shaheed and Nighat Said Khan used research and advocacy to challenge gender-based hierarchies through the Women's Action Forum (WAF) which was crucial in contesting the Hudood Ordinances.

## 3. Deconstruction of Gender Roles

Gender studies allows for the deconstruction of <sup>rigid</sup> gender roles and an exploration of how they influence individual's lives. It helps in challenging gender norms that restrict opportunities and perpetuate inequality. Rubina Saigol explains how gender roles are socially constructed and perpetuated through cultural practices and family structures. Aafiya Sherbano Zia explains how media portrays women and men in stereotypical roles reinforcing that women belong in domestic spaces while men in public spaces.



## Understanding Systemic Oppression of Marginalised Groups

Gender studies plays an important role in the empowerment of marginalised groups, including intersex and transgender. It helps to identify the roots of inequality embedded in cultural, legal, and economic structures. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 in Pakistan provides legal recognition to the rights of transgender and intersex community.

### 5. Addressing the Issue of Women's Absence from Curriculum and Promoting Inclusivity

Women have been excluded from the curriculum at all educational levels in Pakistan for so long. This exclusion reinforces patriarchal norms. Gender studies scholars have critiqued this approach and they advocate for the inclusion of women's contributions, perspectives, and histories.

Nayyar and Salim's report "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan" published in 2005 highlighted that women were either absent or represented in highly traditional, domestic roles in the 2000s. Rubina Saigol also advocates for gender-sensitive pedagogy.

## 6. Empowering Women to Rise Above Economic, Work, and Social Challenges in Pakistan

Gender studies empowers women to explore ways to end their status as underpaid, overworked, abused, and exploited second class citizens. Claudia Goldin, 2023 Nobel Prize winner in Economics, highlights a significant earning gap between men and women in the same field of work. She stresses on the urgent need for flexible workplaces that address the unique challenges faced by women. Gender Studies also provides a critical lens to understand and counteract these systemic inequalities.

## CONCLUSION

Gender Studies discipline does not hold a very long history but it has achieved significant success over the course of time. Its significance can never be denied as it has helped understand the historical and cultural roots of systemic inequalities faced by women and marginalised communities. Its research and action-oriented approach helps to empower women by providing ways to counteract these inequalities.

Good attempt!!