UNIT 15 : GENDER EQUITY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to –

- define the concept of gender equity;
- understand gender equity in the Indian context;
- identify the reasons for gender disparities in India; and
- enumerate the ways to meet the challenges of gender disparity.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Inequality is universal, i.e., you will find it in all societies in one form or the other. Any society is characterized by various kinds of inequality, which are natural. But if this inequality leads to disparity in the distribution of resources, the society starts losing its balance. This unit introduces you to the concept of gender and gender equity. You will also know why gender disparities exist in India. You will be able to understand various challenges brought by gender disparities in a given society. You will also know the ways through which the challenge of gender disparity can be addressed. Let us first look at the concept of gender equity.

15.3 CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUITY

Gender is a socially and culturally constructed term. The word, gender, refers to the socio-cultural definition of men and women; the way societies distinguish between men and women and assign them different social roles. Here, it is important for you to understand the difference between sex and gender. In general terms, sex refers to a person's physical characteristics at birth, and gender encompasses a person's identities, expressions, and societal roles. The word gender is derived from *the French* word *Genese* and Greek word *Gene* which means *Genesis or Type or Kind*. According to UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, "Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity)." Through a process of socialization, one acquires gender i.e. feminine or masculine. The distinction between feminine or masculine can be understood with the help of the peculiarities as found in their behaviour and body structure. In general terms, gender explains the differences between men and women in social terms—their social roles. Therefore, the term gender can be used as an analytical category that is socially constructed to differentiate the biological difference between men and women.

Equity, in general, refers to the distribution of all available resources in a shared manner to the needy of a particular community. Equity states that everyone has different needs and requirements and should be treated accordingly. It is based on the principles of justice and fairness. It is the issue of justice along with the agreed rules and regulations to ensure freedom from biases or discrimination. Significantly, equity is against the belief of excessive individualism, narrow standardization towards uniformity, equality and competition. Equity is very much important from the following points of view:

a. To ensure human rights.

b. To ensure proper utilization of talent.

c. To maintain justice in society.

Gender equity means fair treatment of both men and women according to their respective needs in terms of rights, beliefs, obligations and opportunities. It is the process of allocating resources, programmes and decision-making fairly, without any discrimination based on the gender of the individual. Gender equity aims to provide equal opportunity to both male and female in every respect of society. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1: Define Equity.

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Q. 2: What do you mean by Gender Equity?

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15.4 WHY GENDER EQUITY?

Gender equity is very crucial in the development of any society. All human beings are resources in one way or the other, irrespective of their gender. Therefore, demeaning any category of gender skews development and makes it incomplete and inequitable. If women are not allowed to participate fully in various developmental activities, it means the society is misusing or abusing half of its resources. It is essential for economic development. Gender equity is important to prevent violence against women. Above all, gender equity is a human right and therefore ensuring it is inevitable for the development of society. It has been found from research that in general, women receive worse medical care than men. There are many reasons for this, which includes lack of education and lower incomes as well. Lack of education and employment in the case of women also

affects their ability and attitude towards taking care of the health of the family. It is also linked to the increase in the infant mortality rate. Gender-based discrimination also leads to malnutrition and deprives access to health which is inversely proportional to development. Research also shows that gender equity is linked to peace. Meeting gender equity goals in the areas of education and employment fosters peace.

15.5 GENDER DISPARITY SCENARIO IN INDIA

Gender disparities may be defined as discrimination against any individual based on their sex. As such, in the Indian context, gender disparity has essentially been the discrimination against women. Women are considered traditionally as the weaker section of society. You will find many instances where the rights of women are violated. Violation of rights affects their lives in respect of their socio-economic status and education status and other domestic issues. Especially, violation against women appears in various forms such as preference for a son over daughter, female infanticides, neglecting the girl child in relation to the boy child in terms of such essential needs as nutrition, basic health care and education. These gender-based inequalities are found in different dimensions of life.

1. **Social inequalities:** Patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly called *social inequality*. The Indian society is characterized by various forms of social inequalities based on varied possession of valued resources—money, property, education, health and power as well as social status. However, social inequality is not the outcome of innate or 'natural' differences between people but is produced by the society in which they live. However, gender also brings differences in social status. In most Indian societies, women are given less importance or are regarded as of lesser importance than men.
2. **Economic inequalities:** There is wage inequality between men and women in India. Women are engaged in different works with men but they are not getting equal pay for equal work. Women have equal rights under the law to own property, but in practice, women are still remained at a disadvantage position. Though the Hindu Succession

Act of 2005 provides equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, the law is weakly enforced.

3. **Educational inequalities:** The female literacy rate in India has always remained lower than the male literacy rate (see Table No. 15.1). According to the census of India 2011, the literacy rate of the female is 65.46% compared to the male which is 82.14%. Though the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* Scheme, launched in 2015, has resulted in a slight increase in the gross enrolment ratio, the drop-out rate of girls is still higher. In rural India, the percentage of enrolment of girls is less than boys.

4. **Occupational inequalities:** A study conducted by Tarakeswara Rao et. al in 2011 and published in the Journal of Commerce indicated that almost 50% of the Indian population consists of women, yet fewer than 5% of businesses are owned by women. In fact, in terms of entrepreneurship as an occupation, 7% of total entrepreneurs in India are women, while the remaining 93% are men. Moreover, many jobs and services are still believed to be fit only for men.

Table No. 15. 1: Literacy Rate in India from 1951 to 2011

Census Year	Males	Females	Male Female Gap
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India Report

15.6 REASONS FOR GENDER DISPARITIES IN INDIA

In the Indian context, gender inequality refers to the health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women. The different causes of gender disparities in India are as follows—

1. Patriarchy System:

Patriarchy is a social system in which males are the primary authority of a family and in social organization. The head of the family i.e. the father plays the most significant role in all aspects of life, particularly in decision-making. Patriarchy is a system that places women in a subordinate position to men. In a patriarchal system, the opportunities for males are more than for girls.

- Discrimination against girls in the distribution of property.
- Preference of male child.
- Burden of household work on women and young girls.
- Domestic violence against women etc.
- Lack of discretion on the part of women regarding choices in their own lives.

2. Poverty

A large section of Indian society is suffering from poverty. The people are generally poor with a very low income. Poor people are lacking of the necessary resources and capacity to satisfy basic needs like food, shelter, health and education. They live under difficult conditions which are not conducive for the development of their human potential. It is believed that the male child will become the income source of the family, while the girl child will be married off to another family. Therefore, most of the family gives more importance to the development of the male child than girls.

3. Lack of educational institutions

Lack of primary school and other educational institutions in nearby places is another reason, why parents do not want their girl child to go for higher studies. This leads to limiting their access to further education, thereby creating the gap between the educational achievement of girls and boys.

4. Unfavourable attitude towards women

Unfavourable attitudes towards women in different aspects—education, jobs, business, entrepreneurship, leadership, etc. still prevail in different parts of the country at both individual and societal levels.

This attitude of the people is another cause of gender disparity in India.

5. Sexual division of labour (SDL)

The sexual division of labour has been accepted historically and culturally as a natural order. It can be defined as a separation of labour with respect to gender. The traditional concepts of sexual division of labour are based on—

i. Men are physically powerful than women.
ii. Women are less laborious.
iii. Females are always dependent on the male.
iv. Women have only reproductive power.
v. Women are soft and delicate and are able to do only light works.

6. Son Preferences

A key factor of gender inequality is the preference for a son rather than a girl. Boys are given the exclusive freedom to enjoy their rights. They are treated as additional status for their family. A study conducted in Madurai, India in 2005 found that old age security, economic motivation, and to a lesser extent, religious obligations, continuation of the family name, and help in business or farm were key reasons for son preferences.

7. Dowry System

The system of dowry is deep-rooted in some parts of India since the early days of history. Dowry in an ordinary sense refers to money, gifts, goods, or estate that is brought by the bride to her husband in marriage. Nowadays it is considered a crime. But in some parts of the country, it is still prevalent in explicit or implicit form.

8. Other Reasons

In Indian society, males occupy the leader role in the family as well as society, even marriage of girls occurs at a much younger than of boys. Moreover, most of the girls are not attending the classroom for domestic responsibilities like looking after their siblings, other household chores at home. Another factor is the safety and security of the girls. It can badly affect the academic performance of the girls for which they are not able to go further education.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 3: Mention two reasons for gender disparity in India.

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ACTIVITY 15.1

Observe the status of gender equity in your locality and on the basis of your observation write a report on it by providing your valuable suggestions.

15.7 WAYS FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGES

As you have seen, gender disparity has posed a challenge for society. It is one of the reasons for developmental lag. Although you have seen that there are various reasons for gender disparity in India, there are ways for meeting these challenges. These ways are discussed in the following points—

1) Promote Gender Equity at Home

The first step towards gender equity begins at home. It is important for the parents to understand that girls and boys are equal and act accordingly. There should not be any discrimination in respect to access to opportunity for food, sports, education, equal celebration at birth, etc. It is also important for parents to involve the girls and boys equally in household affairs and decision-making.

2) Promote Gender Equity in Education

Equity in education means to provide equal educational opportunity to all the citizens of the country irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, language, region including sex. It implies an order of society in which none will be deprived of his or her right to receive a quality education. Article 21A of the Indian Constitution clearly stated that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may,

by law, determine." This implies that none can be denied education on the basis of their gender. Education plays a significant role in reducing gender disparity. The aims, objectives, curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and administration of educational institutions should reflect gender equity. The aims and objectives should focus on bringing equality in society in all senses. The curriculum should be gender-sensitive and devoid of anything which is gender-biased. It should also include the policies promoting gender equity. The textbooks should be carefully designed so that they are not gender-biased. The pedagogy should also be gender-sensitive and for this, the teachers need to adopt a suitable attitude to make the environment gender-sensitive. The administrative policies of the institution including enrolment, recruitment, the opportunity for professional growth, leadership, etc. should be such as to devoid of gender discrimination. Educational institutions may also organize awareness programmes, workshops and popular talks on gender issues.

3) Role of Media

Media is a powerful tool. It can reach a lot of people at the same time and influence their mindsets, attitudes and beliefs very strongly. All kinds of media can play a transformative role to promote positive gender role models and equitable gender norms through movies, shows, documentaries, articles and even advertisements. This can be done by creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking stereotypes; by challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions; by showing women in leadership roles and as experts on diverse areas, but not as an exception. Social media also plays a crucial and active role in bringing up gender discrimination issues. Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter have allowed activists around the world to retransmit events live to a broad online audience. People around the world connect with each other easily and local issues become global concerns. One of the examples is the 'MeToo' movement which was widely spread globally through social media.

4) Schemes of Government

The Government of India has been undertaking various schemes to ensure gender equity in society. The following schemes are crucial to ensure gender equity for a progressive society—

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme: This scheme was launched on 22nd January 2015 at Panipat, in response to the falling child sex ratio (CSR). CSR is defined as the number of girls per 1000 boys between 0-6 years of age. From 976 in 1961, the CSR fell to 918 in 2011. This indicated societal discrimination at birth or the pre-natal stage. This scheme aims to protect the baby girls by celebrating their birth, imposing a strict ban on sex determination tests, opposing dowry and child marriage, preventing violence against women in public places or at home.

Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme: The Scheme is designed to provide a bright future for your girl child. It offers a high-interest rate of 7.6% and also tax benefits. It is a government-backed savings scheme as part of the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana' for the benefit of the girl child. Parents can open up to two such accounts for girls (for two girl children). These accounts have a tenure of 21 years or until the girl child marries after the age of 18. Some of the nationalized banks of India are authorized by the Ministry of Finance for offering Sukanya Samriddhi Accounts under this Scheme.

Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA): The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls—SABLA is a centrally sponsored programme of the Government of India initiated on April 1, 2011, under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It is implemented using the platform of ICDS Scheme through Anganwadi Centers. The objectives of the program include enabling the adolescent girls for self-development and empowerment, improving their nutrition and health status, promoting awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition, adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH) and family and child care, upgrading home-based skills, life skills and vocational skills, mainstreaming out-of-school adolescent girls into

formal/non-formal education, providing information/guidance about various public services.

SAKSHAM: SAKSHAM is an initiative to provide disadvantaged youth, especially young women, with essential life and market-oriented vocational skills. This not only helps them to access decent employment but also makes them representatives of a gender-just society and gives them the independence to be themselves. It provides two youth training programmes—a vocational training programme and an entrepreneurial training programme to start your own business. It also helps to teach parents, communities and employers about gender equality, equal opportunities and economic empowerment for girls as gender equality are embedded in all the courses.

ARSH (Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health) programme: The National Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health strategy provides a framework for a range of sexual and reproductive health services to be provided to adolescents. The strategy incorporates a core package of services including preventive, promotive, curative and counselling services through the Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics. One of the interventions of this programme is *Mamta Taruni Abhiyan* which is a community-level intervention to cater to the need of adolescent girls in the age group of 10 to 19 years in rural areas.

5) Legal and Constitutional Safeguard against Gender Inequality

The rights of a girl child are violated in different ways like through child labour, child prostitution, child trafficking, bonded labour etc. Here, you may be wondering why we are particularly concerned about girl children only and not the boys. In most cases, it is evident that the girl child is sent to serve as domestic help and earn money for the family. It is important to prevent child labour of any form. Also, the girl child is more vulnerable in the cases of child trafficking, child marriage, etc. The Indian constitution also provides for some provisions to ensure gender equity.

- Article 15 of the Indian Constitution rightly prohibits all discrimination against citizens on grounds only of religion, race,

caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them.

- Article 15(3) authorizes the state to make any special provision for women and children.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion
- **Dowry Prevention**: The dowry practice in some Indian societies leads to cases of female foeticide, child marriage, preventing girls' education, and sometimes domestic violence. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was enacted to eliminate the practice of dowry.
- Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati.
- **Protection against Female Foeticide**: Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill introduced in Parliament in 1991, passed in 1994 to stop female foeticide (killing of a female foetus in the womb itself) and many more such Acts. Through this Act, the government banned pre-natal sex determination.
- **Protection against Sexual Harassment**: Sexual harassment broadly means any kind of unwelcome physical contact, sexual gestures, comments, sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, etc. by a man to a woman. Indian law protects all women from sexual harassment by men. By virtue of this law, every girl child in India is protected against sexual harassment. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 protects all female workers, whether they are full-time, part-time, consultants, or even interns, against any kind of sexual harassment at work.
- **Right to Abortion**: A female has the right to abortion to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 permits abortion on the following grounds: i) When there is danger to the life or risk of any kind on the health of the women; ii) When the pregnancy arises from kind of crime such

as rape etc; and iii) When there is risk that the child going to be born would suffer from any kind of physical or mental malformation.

- **Right to Property**: The Hindu Succession Act 1956 (amended in 2005) gives equal inheritance rights to daughters and sons (applies to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs). This means that a girl can inherit the same amount of property as her brother. It also provides the right to '*Stridhan*'. It is the property of a female, both movable and immovable, which is her own. It can be a gift, inheritance, maintenance, or even her own earnings. Only she has rights over her '*stridhan*' and she can exclusively decide what she wants to do with it. This law applies only to Hindus.
- **Right to Education**: The Right to Education Act, 2009 provides all children between the ages of six and 14 years the right to free and compulsory elementary education. Although this law is gender-neutral, it gives a push to the education of girl children, by giving them enhanced access to schooling.
- **Right to be raised in a Safe Environment:** All children, including female children, have the right to be brought up in a safe and protected environment. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 makes it illegal for parents and guardians of children to abuse, assault, neglect, or abandon a child. In some Indian societies, the girl child is either abandoned or neglected, or abused because of various reasons cited in Section 15.6.
- **Protection against Domestic Violence**: The Domestic Violence Act, 2005 protects all females from any kind of physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse by family members. The protection extends to all family members with whom the female shares a house—including her family like parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, etc. Therefore, this law protects female children from being abused at home.
- **Right against Child Marriage**: The Prohibition of Child Marriage

Act, 2006 *(by replacing the earlier legislation of Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929)* fixed the minimum age of marriage for girls as 18 years (and for boys, it's 21 years). Any adult responsible for marrying a female child under the age of 18 can be punished by law. Interestingly, the Parliament is now looking to increase the marriageable age for girls to 21 years now (at par with boys).

The last word is that women are to be empowered to maintain gender equity in society. It does not mean that men are to be demeaned. To be precise, both women and men are to be empowered to take control over their lives— which means setting their own goals and agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. No one can empower another person, only the individual can empower herself or himself to make decisions and choices. Therefore, it is important that all these ways to meet the challenge of gender disparity which have been discussed in this section are to be implemented and utilized appropriately by the people to reap their benefits and make gender equity real.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 4: Write any two ways of meeting the gender disparities.

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Q. 5: What does the Hindu Succession Act 1956 (amended in 2005) state?

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ACTIVITY 15.2

Write your observation on the role of social media in creating awareness on gender equity in the society.



15.8 LET US SUM UP

- Gender is a complex term that is socially and culturally constructed.
- The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men.
- Equity, in general, refers to the distribution of all available existing resources in a shared manner to the needy of a particular community.
- Gender equity means fair treatment for both men and women according to their respective needs in terms of rights, beliefs, obligations and opportunities.
- Gender equity is very crucial for the development of any society.
- Gender disparities may be defined as discrimination against women based on their sex.
- In the Indian context, gender disparity has essentially been the discrimination against women. Women are considered traditionally as the weaker sex of society.
- These gender-based inequalities are found in different dimensions of life—social, economic, educational and occupational inequalities.
- There are different causes of gender disparities in India like poverty, patriarchy system, lack of educational institution, unfavourable attitude towards women, sexual division of labour, son preferences, dowry system, domestic responsibilities of women, safety and security of girls, etc.
- The first step towards gender equity begins at home. It is important for the parents to understand that girls and boys are equal and act accordingly.
- Education plays a significant role in reducing gender disparity. The aims, objectives, curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and administration of educational institutions should reflect gender equity.

- All kinds of media can play a transformative role to promote positive gender role models and equitable gender norms through movies, shows, documentaries, articles and even advertisements.
- The Government of India has been undertaking various schemes to ensure gender equity—BPPP, Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme, SABLA, SAKSHAM and ARSH
- The Indian constitution also provides for some legal and constitutional provisions to ensure gender equity through various Acts and Rights.



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15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1: Equity, in general, refers to the distribution of all available existing resources in a shared manner to the needy of a particular community.

Ans. to Q. No. 2: Gender equity means equal treatment for both men and

women according to their respective needs in terms of rights, beliefs, obligations and opportunities.

Ans. to Q. No. 3: The two reasons for gender disparities in India are as follows: Patriarchy System and Dowry System.

Ans. to Q. No. 4: The two ways of meeting gender disparities are: promoting gender equity at home and in education.

Ans. to Q. No. 5: The Hindu Succession Act 1956 (amended in 2005) gives equal inheritance rights to daughters and sons which apply to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs. It also provides the right to '*Stridhan*'.



15.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q. 1: Define gender equity in your own words.

Q. 2: What do you mean by gender inequality?

Q. 3: Write the role of the family in gender equity.

Q. 4: How can education help in bringing gender equity?

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300- 500 words)

Q. 1: Discuss the legal and constitutional safeguards against gender inequality.

Q. 2: Discuss the different reasons for gender disparity.

Q. 3: Describe the measures undertaken by the government to ensure gender equity.

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