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GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

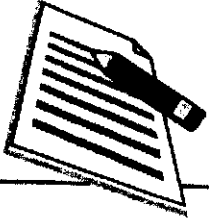
In Lesson number 10 you learnt about the status of women in India during different periods. Though the Constitution has removed the obstacles to liberation of women, gender discrimination still exists in different social institutions. As a result women in India are not able to enjoy an equal status. In this lesson you will see how gender discrimination is responsible for such a situation.

Imagine these scenes:

1. You are waiting for a bus at the bus stop and a young man takes out a knitting needle and wool and starts knitting. A schoolgirl who is also waiting for a bus climbs a tamarind tree to look for raw tamarind.
2. A couple lives in your neighbourhood. The husband stays at home and takes care of their two-year-old daughter and manages other household chores while the wife works in a bank as a manager.

Do these events surprise you? Have you heard people reacting to these incidents by saying?

- i) Oh, look at this man knitting a sweater, as if he were a woman.
- ii) Being a girl 'see how she is climbing a tree'!
- iii) Is not this man a 'house husband'? Being a male, he should have gone out to work, while his wife stayed back at home to take care of the child and do all the housework. And look at that woman, does she not feel guilty about leaving her little child behind and make her husband toil hard?



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What is so unique about these scenes/events that people have to express their surprise or pass such comments? Why cannot a man knit or a girl climb a tree? What is wrong if a man stays at home and takes responsibility for child care and house work? Why cannot a woman give full time attention to her career? These images seem to surprise people because they are contrary to the practices, which they usually see in society. No law has laid down that men and women should only do or should not do certain types of work. It is our culture, which has built many stereotype (*typical*) images of men and women, and over a period of time most people have come to accept it as the right image. Simply because men and women have different biological roles to perform, it is being interpreted that they have to behave differently. This misconception will be clear if you understand what is meant by the term 'gender' and how these gender differences are actually constructed by society and not inborn.



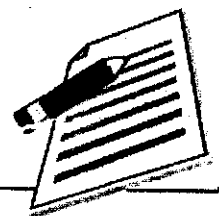
OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- clarify the meaning of the term gender;
- differentiate between the terms *gender* and *sex*;
- explain the meaning of gender discrimination;
- describe the ways by which gender discrimination is practised in different social institutions;
- analyse the phenomenon of gender discrimination from a feminist point of view; and
- discuss the meaning of gender equality and the ways by which it can be achieved.

33.1 MEANING OF THE TERM GENDER

If you turn the pages of an English dictionary and look for the meaning of the word gender, you will find it defined as 'being male or female'. Another usage of the term gender is that it is applied when classifying nouns as masculine, feminine or neuter. But the two above mentioned usages of the term gender are too simplistic. The word gender cannot be used to refer to biological differences between males and females. That difference is best described by using the word sex. In other words, the term sex refers to the biological characteristics by which human beings are classified as male and female. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the social, cultural and psychological characteristics by which human behaviour is categorized as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. The term gender is used in sociology to refer to the differences society posits in categorising human beings as masculine and feminine. Is there then a difference between the words male and female and masculine and



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feminine? Yes. Read the following sentences carefully.

Gender is not determined by an individual's biological characteristics, but by how society looks at the roles of men and women. In other words, gender is socially constructed.

Sex is determined by differences in biological characteristics.

The following examples will help you to understand the differences between gender and sex.

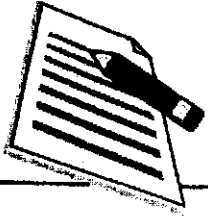
Example 1: It is not a man who gives birth to a child but a woman. This is because a woman has the organ uterus or the womb, in which a baby develops before birth. Since a man does not possess this organ, he can not give birth to a baby. This act of a woman giving birth to a baby and a man not being able to do that can be explained by the differential biological characteristics, which males and females possess. This difference can be understood by using the word sex.

Example 2: A boy falls down while playing with his friends in the school ground. He is hurt badly and starts crying. Instead of giving him first aid, his friends start teasing him by saying 'Aye! Look at him crying as if he is a girl. Go and get him a frock and bangles so that he can wear those and be a girl'. Why should a boy not cry? When there is physical or mental pain, human beings tend to give an expression to this pain by crying. It is more of a human reaction than a male or a female reaction. If a girl or a woman cries, it is accepted as a perfectly normal thing for her to do but if a boy or a man cries, it is considered unnatural behaviour. A man not crying or a woman crying has nothing to do with their differences in their biological characteristics. This is the way society has come to allocate (*assign/distribute*) roles to them. Characteristics such as courage, strength, and independence are attributed to boys. Girls are supposed to be timid, weak and dependent. Such socially (*attributed*) masculine or feminine characteristics can be understood by using the term gender.

Activity: Identify two activities, where you notice gender differences in your day-to-day life. Write a note of 250 words on how you can counter these gender differences. (The Study Centre has to take care of this 'Learning through Activity' exercise. This should be a Teacher Marked Assignment)

33.2 GENDER DISCRIMINATION-MEANING

It is true that men and women are biologically different, but keeping this as a base can the two sexes be treated differently? All children in the age group 6-11 years must be in primary school, but why do we find more boys than girls in schools? Is



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not education as important for a girl, as it is for a boy? Why should a girl be kept away from school and forced to work at home, while her brothers attend school regularly? Why should only a girl child do all the housework and her brothers be spared from this burden? It is this differential treatment (*act/practice of treating men and women differently*) of males and females in our society, which is called gender discrimination. A girl or a woman is denied an opportunity not because she is incapable or incompetent but because she is a female. In talking about status of women it is gender discrimination that is borne in mind.

33.3 HOW DOES GENDER DISCRIMINATION OPERATE IN OUR SOCIETY?

Seema and Sameer are applicants for a job in an engineering firm. Both have passed their engineering examination with distinction. In fact, Seema stood first in her University. She performed very well in the interview. But, it was Sameer and not Seema who was given the job. Seema was really upset about this and went and questioned the manager of the firm. 'Did I not do well', she asked. The manager's reply was like this— 'Yes, you did well. In fact your performance was better than that of Sameer. We preferred him because he is a male. You might leave the job when you get married, and even if you remain here, you will ask for maternity leave, when you have children. We cannot afford to loose you or sanction leave'. Seema did not get this job only because she is a woman. It was not her ability that mattered, but the imagined fear of the employer that she may either leave the job or seek leave, which actually took away her chance. If Seema did not have the required qualification, she need not have been given the job, but even though she was the most suitable candidate, she was denied this opportunity. This is a clear case of gender discrimination.

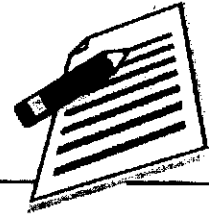
Gender discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution of India

Gender discrimination was prohibited by the Constitution of India vide Article 15 (1) when it declared 'The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them'.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 33.1

Answer in one Sentence

1. What is gender?



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2. What is Sex?

3. What is gender discrimination?

4. Which article in the Constitution of India prohibits gender discrimination?

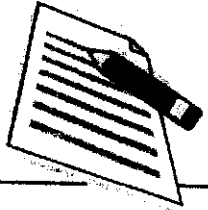
33.4 GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Law treats men and women as equals, but in practice, gender discrimination exists in all social institutions. It begins in the family and spreads to other institutions in society.

33.4.1 The Family

Look at the way the family treats women and men differently. In most households, the father is considered the head of the family and hence, the centre of authority. Women generally perform kitchen work, childcare and other domestic chores. Regardless of whether a woman is in paid employment outside the home or not, domestic work is considered a woman's area or sphere. Since household work is unpaid, it is not considered as important as paid work, which is generally done by men. Even though there is a gradual increase in the number of women being employed outside the home in wage work, the image of a male as the 'bread winner' continues to persist. Though women spend a great deal of their time on household work and childcare it is treated as unproductive labour. The distribution of work-roles in the family based on sex is called *gender division of labour*. While a woman's place is primarily within the home and hence private, a man's place of activity is mainly outside the home and is public.

This gender division of labour also gives rise to an unequal division of power between males and females within the household. The male is generally the head of the family. Authority and property are usually transferred in the male line. As a result of the power, which a man who is generally the oldest among the male members of a family enjoys, he achieves and maintains dominance over females and younger male members. This arrangement of relationships, which upholds male superiority and female subordination (*submissiveness*), is called *Patriarchy*. In a male dominated family set up, women are expected to merge (*combine*) their identity with that of a male member, be it the father or the husband. Though women



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play a primary role in the survival and maintenance of the household, their position in household decision-making is almost always secondary. In patriarchal families, inheritance rights are traced and passed on through the male line and women may not have a share at all or an equal share in the family property.

In India, nearly 30 per cent of the households survive on the earnings of women. Such households are referred to as **female headed households**. However, this headship generally refers to the responsibility a woman assumes for running the family and not to the power she exercises over other members, especially her husband. Even where the wife takes the sole responsibility for household maintenance, it is not uncommon to see her being subject to physical or/and mental violence. This is what is meant by **unequal gender relations within the family**.

In many ways family socialization upholds gender discrimination. Daughters and sons are brought up to perform different roles and acquire (*learn*) different qualities. Marriage and motherhood are prescribed as the ultimate goals for daughters, where as, for sons, a career is given the greatest importance. Family resources are not equally distributed among daughters and sons. One prominent example is the readiness of many families to spend any amount of money on providing the best education for sons and not daughters. The argument is that resources spent on a son's education bring back returns to the family, but the daughter takes away family resources, including dowry when she moves to another family upon marriage. It is this kind of thinking, which has led to an increase in such practices as female foeticide, female infanticide and dowry.

The family is thus the first source of discrimination. It is in the family that daughters and sons are socialized for playing different roles in society. This role allocation (*distribution*) is not based on ability but on sex. Such a pattern of preparing daughters and sons for playing different roles is known as **gender-biased socialization**. Since an individual's first contacts are with his or her family, the seeds of gender inequality are sown in the family and are transferred to other institutions in society.

33.4.2 Religion

All over the world, religion has had a profound impact on human behaviour. Religion has a long past and religious texts have been mostly composed by men. Since women were not allowed to receive education for a long time, they could not read what was actually written in the religious texts. So these have often been used to discriminate against women. There is little wonder that many values and practices, which suppress women, claim to have religious sanction. Many a time religion practices double standards, in that in one breath it says that women should be



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treated with the highest respect, and in another it upholds such practices as humiliation of widows, child marriage or *sati*. We have earlier read about one instance of this in Manusmriti. In many religious rituals women and men are not accorded equal status. A widow or a single woman is not allowed to perform certain rituals. A woman derives her status from her husband and, in his absence she loses that status.

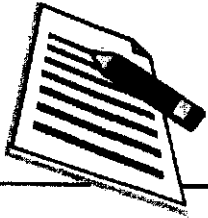
Since religion has a large following, its influence in formulating social attitudes relating to men and women is very strong.

33.4.3 Education

Education has a special and unique role to play in all societies. It is the social institution, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of transmission of culture from one generation to the other. Education is imparted both through schools and institutions outside the school, including the family and the church/temple. The school has a very strong influence in the formative years of a child's life. Images and impressions created in the school have a long way to go in moulding a child's views about gender. The National Policy of Education, 1986 had laid down that gender discrimination must be completely eliminated from the educational system. Yet, many school textbooks continue to present women/girls in negative images. Look at these examples:

- Father is the head of the family;
- Father is the breadwinner for the family;
- Mother cooks in the kitchen, while the father reads the newspaper;
- Some women also work as nurses or teachers;
- Kamala helps her mother in the kitchen while her brother Raja accompanies his father to the market; and
- Leena washes the clothes in the backyard while her brother Ameer is studying in the hall.

The central ideas conveyed by all these examples is that a woman's place is in the home and a man's place outside. Such lessons also uphold the idea that domestic work is the sole responsibility of a woman, and that the world outside the home or public spaces essentially belong to a male. This gender bias in school textbooks affects young minds correspondingly. In spite of the fact that a large number of women are engaged in gainful employment and contribute to the well being of their families, their contribution is overlooked. Even otherwise, in most families these are the images, which children get to see day-after-day and textbooks often strengthen these gender stereotypes (*projecting women and men in roles considered typically male or female*). Even today in many schools girls and



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boys are not permitted to play the same games or mingle freely.

At higher levels of education some courses are considered more suitable for women than men. No college will directly tell a woman that she can not apply for a certain course. But in practice women are not really welcome in many courses. Even though the entry of women in higher education is on the increase in recent times they are still concentrated in such disciplines as liberal arts, biological sciences, computers and electronics. These are considered 'soft courses' and hence, more suitable for women. Thus in so, many ways, education still upholds gender discrimination.

Education should function as the most powerful instrument of social change. It is through education that new ideas are to be created and circulated, but in reality it does not always happen so.

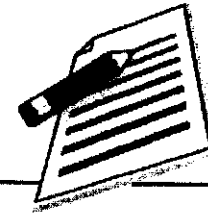
INTEXT QUESTIONS 33.2

Fill in the Blanks

1. Distribution of work roles based on a person's sex is known as _____
2. Families, which depend only on the earnings of women are called _____
3. The National Policy of education of _____ laid down that gender discrimination should be eliminated by education.
4. Lessons, which convey the meaning that a man's place is outside and a woman's place inside the home are examples of _____

33.4.4 Economic Institutions

In the initial stages of history when men and women were moving from one place to another in search of food and shelter; there was no structured gender division of labour. Nevertheless, some sort of division of labour did exist among the foraging bands and hunting and gathering people. Men hunted, while women gathered roots and fruits. But when human beings began to lead a settled existence and adopted plough based agriculture, a clear division between the work spheres of men and women emerged. While men ploughed the land, women largely managed domestic work and took the responsibility for child bearing and rearing. Around this time work itself came to be divided into two spheres namely *man's work* and *woman's work*. But the household continued to remain the unit of both production and consumption. It was with industry and manufacturing that the domestic unit



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began to lose out as a production unit. The world outside the home became a man's world and the world inside the home became a woman's world. A woman came to be referred to, as 'housewife' or 'home maker', while a man began to be recognized as a **producer** or the **breadwinner**.

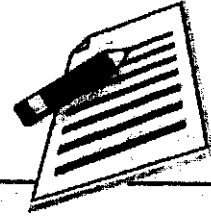
After industrialization swept the world, men got a further advantage over women because they had better opportunities to acquire education and skills. Since a large number of women stayed at home most of the time they did not have an exposure to the changes and developments taking place outside. Even if women entered industries, it was mostly in the lower level jobs.

In India today, the economy is divided into two categories, namely **organized (formal)** and **unorganized (informal)** sectors. The organized sector refers to jobs, which have a regular wage structure, through elaborate on labour laws and work related benefits. But the unorganized sector consists of jobs, which are neither assured of a protected wage nor employment guarantee. The largest number of women who work outside their homes are in the unorganized sector and are subject to exploitation of different kinds. Though there is a law that equal pay be given for equal work, often women get lesser pay than men for the same work. In agriculture or construction work, the jobs which women perform are paid a lower wage than those performed by men

Whether women work outside their homes or not, domestic work is almost always a woman's responsibility. Though it is not possible to provide exact figures relating to the number of men who share domestic responsibilities, it is definitely true that in most families women take the **sole responsibility for housework**. Women who have to work both inside and outside their home thus suffer the 'double burden' or 'double drudgery'. In any case, it is a woman who works most and receives the least recognition and benefits.

33.4.5 Political Institutions

In all societies there is an arrangement for formation and implementation of law and order. In simple societies agencies of social control were largely informal, for example, customs or norms. A council of elders ensured that members of a community followed the norms laid down by that community. As societies became more complex and formal, the state took over the responsibility of governance and institutions such as assemblies and Parliament replaced informal institutions. But whether it was the informal system of political governance or the formal system, the representation of women has always been very low. Democracy for most women means casting their votes in elections and not participating as people's representatives. Politics is still considered as unsuitable for women because they have no experience of handling power.



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33.5 GENDER DISCRIMINATION – A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Why is it important to examine gender discrimination from a feminist viewpoint?

Most people in this society take gender discrimination for granted. They accept gender stereotypes as the right images of men and women. What is wrong if advertisements for detergent soaps always show women washing clothes, they seem to ask? But there are many people, particularly women, who reject these stereotypes. They are called feminists. Now let us ask the question, 'what is feminism?'

What is Feminism?

Feminism is both a concept and practice (Feminists do not just preach equality between men and women but also try to promote its achievement). Broadly defined, it is a state of awareness that women are oppressed and exploited in all social institutions. Feminism does not just stop at recognizing that there is oppression of women. It believes in raising consciousness and initiating action for bringing about change. They raise questions and resort to protests when women's rights and self-respect are hurt.

Feminism rejects the notion (*idea*) that biological differences between men and women should form the basis for treating them differently. They trace the roots of gender discrimination to the social inequalities that are inbuilt in human societies. Feminists use terms like *patriarchy*, *male domination*, *female subordination* and *women's oppression* to explain gender discrimination, which operates in our society. Patriarchy as the word itself indicates, is a system where the father or the patriarch has the control. This control gives him power over other members of the family and creates a belief that men have unlimited power over women. The classification of women's role as *reproductive* and men's roles as *productive* has created a situation where the man came to be recognized as the person contributing to household survival. Even though child bearing and child rearing are very important for the survival and continuation of a society, these roles are always sidelined. This is done by giving women's labour in these tasks very minimal social and economic value. Besides reproductive work, women also run the household. Tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, care of the sick and guest care involve a great deal of physical and mental labour. Just because this labour is unpaid and invisible it is not socially recognized. Feminists argue that this distinction between work as productive and unproductive must cease to exist and women's contribution, paid or unpaid must be recognized as work. The feminist slogan *All women are workers* is a clear indication of the need to recognize and respect housework as something as important as other types of work.



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Gender division of labour has been a characteristic of all societies. In many traditional societies women take an active part in activities outside the home. These include activities such as hunting and farming. But we generally do not see women projected as performing these roles. More often than not, you get to see women shown as homemakers, nurses, school teachers, office secretaries and computer programmers or telephone operators. The representation of women in non-traditional jobs such as business executives, technicians, bus or engine drivers or pilots is still very low. So the popular impression is that women are not suitable for jobs, which involve hard physical labour. But this is not true. Have you not seen women stone-cutters and construction-workers? After seeing the hard work, which they are doing do you still think women are the weaker sex? Thus, feminists reject the idea of women as the weaker sex and raise the slogan *a woman's biology is not her destiny (just because a person is born a female she need not be forced to play nor prevented from playing a particular role)*.

According to feminists gender related prejudices (*narrow-mindedness/intolerance*) and practices are deep rooted in all social institutions. Gender division of responsibilities, which was initially an arrangement worked out for convenience turned into an oppressive tool over a period of time. It is true that during certain periods of their life such as pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing women are temporarily away from active participation in public life. Over a period of time, this temporary separation was virtually converted to an exclusion from public life and women came to be relegated to a secondary position. A large number of women play *two work-roles (both as home-makers and paid workers outside the home)* in contrast to men who play a *single work-role*. Such women work for longer hours, yet social attitudes towards them are essentially biased. Women are treated primarily as 'wives' and 'mothers' and not as 'workers' or 'producers'.

Because feminists question and protest male domination, their goals are often misunderstood. They are dubbed as 'man haters', 'home breakers', or 'destroyers of family peace'. But, all these accusations are far from the truth. A feminist questions and fights against a male dominated social system, of which women are also often part of. Their struggle is against injustices being done to women and all those who are responsible for this, be they men or women. The goal of feminism is not to set women against men, but to create a gender sensitive society, which treats men and women as equals. The ultimate goal of feminism is to establish a society, which is committed to gender equality in thought, word and deed.

33.6 WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY

By now you must have understood that the term gender includes both men and women and not just women. Gender equality refers to a situation or condition in,



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which men and women receive equal treatment in all social institutions. In a gender-equal society women and men have the freedom to exercise their choices and treat each other with respect. Neither is a woman discriminated nor a male preferred. In a gender equal social order, both men and women are liberated from oppressive social expectations and can live and function in a manner, which satisfies themselves and not others.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 33.4

Fill in the Blanks

1. A _____ questions and protests gender discrimination.
2. Housework is generally considered _____.
3. A family where the father has power and authority is called _____.
4. A society which treats women and men as equals, is referred to as a _____ society.

33.7 HOW COULD GENDER EQUALITY BE ACHIEVED

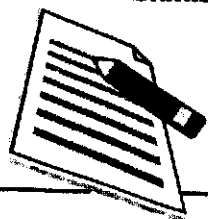
It is needless to say that the first step towards achieving gender equality is the creation of a society where all forms of inequality between men and women are removed. In a gender-equal society, men and women will have the freedom to exercise their choices to 'do' or 'not to do' certain jobs. Gender equality is achieved when women neither feel inferior nor men superior. People should not feel that motherhood is a woman's weakness on the contrary, it should be regarded as her strength. Both parents should take equal responsibility for child rearing. That is why feminists use the word *dual parenting* instead of *mothering* or *fathering*. Dual parenting is a concept used to explain a situation in which both the father and the mother take responsibility for bringing up their children.

Note: Draw a picture showing both parents bathing their children or helping them to prepare for school.

[INSERT PICTURE]

Ms and not Mrs.

A woman's identity will not be lost in a gender equal society. Irrespective of her marital status the prefix to a woman's name is Ms. and not Mrs., as



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is commonly used to address married women. When a male is married he never loses his identity and hence a woman has as much right to retain her identity as a female.

In a gender equal social set up both men and women are respected for what they can do, and not treated with disrespect for what they cannot do. A male doing housework is as acceptable as a woman doing it. Violence, either in the form of physical abuse or mental torture cannot be tolerated in a gender equal society. In other words a **gender-equal society** is also a **gender-just society**. By gender justice, we mean a condition, where men and women are given respect and equal access to opportunities from the time they are born, and get opportunities because of their competence and not because they are male or female. In the ultimate analysis, gender equality is achieved when women live with dignity and exercise freedom of choice to control their lives both within and outside the household.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

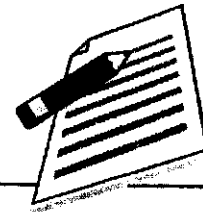
- Sex is determined by biological characteristics, and gender is socially constructed (*it is the creation of society*).
- The denial of opportunities in society to a woman, not because she is not eligible but only by virtue of the fact that she is female is known as gender discrimination.
- In theory, there is no gender discrimination in India because the Constitution of India vide Article 15(1) prohibits it.
- Gender discrimination exists in all social institutions, prominent examples being family, religion, education, economy and polity.
- Feminism is an ideology that believes in the equality of men and women. Feminists are aware of the fact that women are oppressed and exploited in all social institutions and fight this discrimination. The goal of feminism is to establish a gender equal society.
- Gender equality refers to a condition in which men and women receive equal treatment in all social institutions.
- Gender equality is achieved when obstacles to the liberation of women are removed and women and men share responsibilities not only in the family but society at large.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

Answer the following questions in 200-300 words.

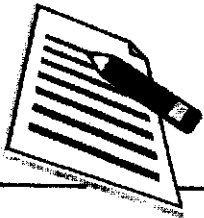
1. Distinguish between sex and gender with the help of suitable examples.
2. What is gender discrimination? Discuss its causes.
3. Define feminism and state its objectives.
4. What is gender equality? With suitable examples show how it can be achieved in the family.



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GLOSSARY

1. **Gender:** The differences between men and women as created by society.
2. **Sex:** Biological difference between men and women.
3. **Gender Discrimination:** Differential treatment of men and women.
4. **Gender division of Labour:** Distribution of work roles based on sex.
5. **Gender biased socialization:** Preparation of boys and girls for playing different roles in society.
6. **Female-headed households:** Households surviving on the earnings of women only.
7. **Organized sector employment:** Jobs, which have a regular wage structure, protection from labour laws and other work related benefits. It is also known as the formal sector.
8. **Unorganized sector employment:** Jobs, which are not assured of regular wages, employment guarantee, protection from labour laws and other work related benefits. It is also known as the informal sector.
9. **Double drudgery:** Women's work both inside and outside the household.
10. **Feminism:** An ideology which recognizes the existence of gender inequality and protests against the same.
11. **Gender equality:** A condition in which men and women receive equal treatment in all social institutions.



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ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

33.1

- 1 Different images given by society to men and women.
- 2 Biological differences between men and women.
- 3 Treating men and women differently.
- 4 Article 15 (1).

33.2

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Gender division of labour | 2. Female Headed Households |
| 3. 1986 | 4. Gender bias |

33.3

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| 1. False | 2. True |
| 3. False | 4. True |

33.4

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Feminist | 2. Unproductive |
| 3. Patriarchal family | 4. Gender equal |