


Chapter 5


Gender Equality: A Catalyst for Global Sustainable Future

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ABSTRACT

The paradox between inborn sexual identity and socially constructed gender identity existed throughout history. Unfortunately, gender identity got predominance over sexual identity in the context of patriarchy and religious beliefs. Even when all religions affirm the equality of both sexes, they demand the subordination of women. This continues to exist even in modern society. From the 19th century onwards, there were various efforts to address gender disparity that took place under the initiatives of feminism, human rights and women's rights movements. The United Nations in the second half of the 20th century advanced many attempts for the realization of gender equality. However, the present data shows that it will still take another 131 years to achieve gender equality. In this perspective, the chapter critically examines the attempts for gender equality and proposes certain policy changes and essential requirements for its true realization in view of sustainable future.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sex and gender are two confusing and complex terms that divide society for a good period. Although sex and gender are entirely different concepts, societal misunderstandings led to their presentation in equal terms. Sex denotes an individual's biological identity, whereas gender is a socially imposed construct (Reale et al., 2021). Both males and females are equal in dignity, value, and rights, but physiologically different. The World Bank (2018) identified 28 legal gender differences; we do not enter such a detailed discussion. Our focus in this chapter is limited to the gender difference between men and women. Subscribing to the gender theory over physiological differences, the patriarchal society affirmed that men have more powers and privileges in society than women (Carbajal, 2018). This patriarchal influence was visible in almost all religions and cultures to different degrees. Accordingly, women were always sidelined from the mainstream of society and left without any basic rights and privileges.

The present globe gives more emphasis on the aspirations of gender equality thanks to human rights movements and feminist initiatives. The United Nations (UN) primarily focused on gender equality with the third goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although some progress has been made, it has not fully realized its objective. Hence, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its fifth goal affirmed gender equality as not only a fundamental human right but as a vital foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (UNDESA, n.d.). Both these endeavors from the part of the UN contributed to an increasing awareness among people about the importance of gender justice in the society. Gender equality cannot be thought of without adhering to the principle of gender justice and the 21st century's aspirations of gender equality revolve around the core idea of gender justice (Clavero & Galligan, 2021).

There has been laudable progress in the efforts to achieve gender equality. Many women world leaders, company CEOs, professionals, scholars, and researchers affirm that women have equal potential to contribute to societal growth. However, there are still countries, especially in the developing world, where women are discriminated on the basis of their gender in many ways and in different zones. They are subjugated as mere properties of men claiming that the religious or societal principles demand so. Some societies still place a lot of restrictions on the freedom of women showing bias towards their gender. The UN's 2030 agenda of a global sustainable future will not be realizable without the actual realization of gender equality. Gender equality basically stands for equality of all genders. But for the purpose of this chapter, we restrict ourselves to the equality of women in various areas of social life as they are the most discriminated gender throughout.

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