



# Gender and Women's Studies:

## Interdisciplinary *Approaches and Perspectives*

VOLUME-II

EDITORS

DR. DIPAK KUMAR DOLEY

DR. ABUL FOYES MD MALIK



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- PUBLISHED BY : DR. DIPAK KUMAR DOLEY, DEPT. OF ENGLISH  
DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY, DIBRUGARH
- DR ABUL FOYES MD MALIK, DEPT. OF BENGALI  
DIGBOI MAHILA MAHAVIDYALAYA, DIGBOI
- FIRST PUBLISHED : DECEMBER, 2020
- EDITED BY : DR. DIPAK KUMAR DOLEY, DEPT. OF ENGLISH  
DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY, DIBRUGARH
- DR ABUL FOYES MD MALIK  
DEPT. OF BENGALI, DIGBOI MAHILA MAHAVIDYALAYA
- COVER DESIGN : EDITORS
- PRICE : 1000/- (RUPEES ONE THOUSAND ONLY)
- PRINTED BY : THE ASSAM COMPUTERS  
SECTOR - 49, BY LANE - 5<sup>TH</sup>  
BAMUNIMAIDAN INDUSTRIAL AREA  
GUWAHATI
- ISBN : "978-81-948854-7-4"

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## Editorial...

Gender and Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary academic programme that examines the cultural and social construction of gender, explores the history, experiences and contributions of women to society, and studies the influences of gender on the lives of women and men. It examines the gendered diversity of human experience. It uses the lens of gender to explore stratification, colonization, power relationships and cultural stereotypes, and it encourages a sense of empowerment through an examination of commonality and diversity. It is an interdisciplinary field that challenges the androcentric production of knowledge which is the privileging of male- and masculine-centered ways of understanding the world. Feminist scholars argue that the common assumption that knowledge is produced by rational, impartial (male) scientists often obscures the ways that scientists create knowledge through gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized cultural perspectives. Exploring gender with the tools of different, and often multiple, disciplines, Gender and Women's Studies strive to help us better understand how knowledge and value take different forms, depending on a variety of social variables. Although gender is a central component of every subject, the study of gender requires attention to connections between gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, nationality, and other social categories, and different subjects shed light on different aspects of such connections.

Gender studies form part of a significant shift into interdisciplinarity in academic fields more widely, which is reflected in the issue-based calls of funding bodies, special editions of journals and the growth of interdisciplinary research fields. Gender studies are an integral part of this interdisciplinary movement that offers theoretical and methodological advantages in understanding multiply constituted social worlds and addressing pressing global problems, such as the dynamics of migration, uneven global power geometries and climate change. Not only are most of the big issues in the contemporary world underpinned by social divisions including those based on sex and gender, but also the issues addressed by sexual politics are often a key motor of activism and change. Gender studies are distinctive in their engagement with interdisciplinarity, which have developed through a synergy between thought and activism. This field of research and study draws upon the tradition of women's studies, feminist theories and activism, rather than being merely part of recent trends and fashions, in a shift to interdisciplinary theory, which goes beyond multi- or trans-disciplinary approaches. Gender studies have grown out of the need to address some of the big issues in everyday life as well as on the global arena of international politics in which cultural, economic, political and social inequalities are played out. Gender awareness has become integral to disciplinary fields as diverse as history, literature, science, sociology and economics, as well as emerging as a field of studies, which goes much further than the mainstreaming of gender. Sexual politics and gender studies have more recently engaged with some of the dilemmas, which have been presented by diversity policies, for example, European Union equality policies, which might be seen to have gone beyond gender or in which gender has been marginalized.

It is increasingly more usual to describe the field of study to which gender and gender relations are central as "gender studies" rather than "women's studies", which reflects

a historical, chronological shift as well as intellectual connections and the growth of empirical research in the field. Although gender studies are relatively recent in the academy, most work in this area builds upon the growth of the women's movement as part of the identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s, and the development of Women's Studies Centres in North American, Australian and European countries. All these centres were characterized by emancipatory aspirations that sought to provide robust empirical evidence and scholarly bases for political change, in particular by putting gender, and in the 1970s and 1980s, more specifically women onto the political agenda and into discourse.

Gender studies have as their foundation an engagement with the sexed body and with the interrelationship between sex and gender, which at times are inextricably entangled. Gender has become the preferred term for referring to social difference, partly because of its wider scope and remit than sex, which has been assumed to be biological and anatomical, and to challenge the apparent limitations of biological reductionism. However, there is a case for the inclusion of sex and gender as part of the explanatory framework of sexual politics. Gender studies have taken over from women's studies in the academy for a number of reasons, not all of them liberatory. Women's studies and feminism not only put gender into the agenda but also offered new ways of understanding gender as a social, cultural and political process and structure through which societies are organized. Although many earlier accounts suggested a division between sex as anatomical and biological, and gender as the social and cultural manifestations of sex, there are strong arguments for sex as shaped by cultural forces and made through social practices. One of Butler's major contributions to gender studies and to the study of social relations and the operation of power across disciplines is her critique of sex and sexuality as well as gender as performative. Sex, as much as gender, is produced by the processes and practices through which it is defined and classified. Butler's work has generated questions and debates about the materiality of sex, the fluidity and the transgressive properties of sex, gender and sexuality. Debates within gender studies about the nature of sex and gender invoke the need for interdisciplinary approaches as well as drawing upon a range of disciplines and theoretical frameworks.

Gender and Women's Studies debate about the theory and practice of gender, and the interdisciplinary implications of gender as a means of making sense of social divisions and lived experience. Gender studies also offer a means of exploring what is involved in interdisciplinary work and the relationship between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, which emerge from interdisciplinary studies as an established field of enquiry with its own capacities and distinct features. Gender is itself a contested category, an exploration of which creates new ways of thinking about the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. Gender is both an empirical category and a theoretical conceptualization, which facilitates greater understanding of social relations and divisions as well as describing them. A focus on gender generates different and often innovative methodologies as well as a plurality of theoretical approaches, which are directed at making sense of inequalities and at celebrating the experiences and contributions of hitherto marginalized groups.

Editors -

Dr. Dipak Kumar Doley  
Dr. Abul Foyes Md Malik

## CONTENTS

- Understanding History and Memory Through Easterine Kire's *Mari and A Respectable Woman*  
**Kaberi Sonowal** 1
- Ismat Chughtai's "Lihaaf": A Non-Normative Love Affair Between Two Women  
**Miss Debalina Konar** 4
- Women Empowerment and Female Labour Force Participation in India  
**Pubali Hazarika** 8
- Notions of Gender in Two of the Most Celebrated Writers' Works: *The God of Small Things* And *Undertow*  
**Upasana Handique** 12
- Cyber Harassment and Violence Against Women: The Voices of the Victims  
**Nitish Gogoi** 15
- A Postcolonial Reading of Race and Gender in J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace*  
**Srijana Kaushik** 20
- Women Entrepreneurship in Assam: Potentials and Challenges  
**Manuranjan Gogoi** 24
- A Gender perspectives: Fertility is a Founding Norm of Women's Beauty with special reference of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*  
**Nilam Gogoi** 30
- Proprietary Rights of Women in Ancient India with Special Reference to Stridhana  
**Bornali Buragohain, Polly Rajkhowa** 34
- A Study on Menstrual Hygiene and Its Impact on Education of the Adolescents with Special Reference to Puranigudam (Nagaon)  
**Dibyashree Borah, Dibyajyoti Biswas** 39
- The Position of Women in the Early Indian Society  
**Navajit Saikia** 46
- Diasporic and Subaltern Feminism in the Autobiographical Works of Maya Angelou and Maria Campbell  
**Dermeeg Pegu** 49
- Women Empowerment through Women Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of Woman Entrepreneurs of Mising Community of Jorhat District of Assam  
**Jyotika Medok** 55
- Role of Women Collectives in Financial Inclusion for Better Livelihood  
**Syeda Nur Asma Ahmed** 61
- The Theme of Marginalisation of Women in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*  
**Salma Begum** 67
- The Marginalized Female: A Feminist Reading of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*  
**Reeti Boruah** 70

○ Gender and Migration: A Study Over Indian Migrated Workers With Special Reference to Covid-19 Era <b>Antara Hazarika</b>	74
○ Racial Discrimination in the African American Society and the Trauma of Being a 'Mother': A Reading of Toni Morrison's 'Beloved' <b>Sirajuddin Ahmed</b>	79
○ Domestic Violence Against Women in Assam <b>Lakhman Kumar, Monika Boro</b>	83
○ Decoding the Queer and their Trauma: A Study of Hanif Kureishi's <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i> and Mahesh Dattani's <i>On a Muggy Night in Mumbai</i> <b>Janardan Chetia</b>	89
○ Status of Women in Tiwa Tribal Society of North East India <b>Mrs. Krishna Kachari</b>	93
○ Women and Human Rights <b>Ms. Manmayuri Goswami, Ms. Sobha Lakshmi Hazarika</b>	98
○ Gender Stereotype and Present Assamese Society <b>Bidisha Dowarah</b>	103
○ Doctrine and Custom vs. Gender and Identity: A Re-reading of Indira Goswami's novel <i>The Moth Eaten Howdah of The Tusker</i> <b>Dhurum Sula Boro</b>	106
○ Portrayal of Women in Indian Television Advertisement <b>Pinky Biswash</b>	111
○ Women Education in India: The Role of Indian Government for Their Educational Upliftment <b>Darshana Bordoloi</b>	116
○ Woman's Oppression and Religion <b>Indra Kumar Borah</b>	120
○ A Queer Reading: Transgression from Normative Sexual Identity in Shyam Selvadurai's <i>Funny Boy</i> <b>Chinmoyee Deka</b>	126
○ Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Activities: A Sociological Study in Jorhat District of Assam <b>Monoj Bora</b>	132
○ The Journey of Rupī Kaur's Feminist Poetry from Cyberspace to the Traditional Print Medium and the Inherent Debate of Legitimacy Surrounding Her Work <b>David Lagachu</b>	138
○ A Glimpse of Maternal Mortality in Assam <b>Meghna Saikia</b>	145
○ Women and Age of Consent Controversy: A Study of Social Responses in 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Assam <b>Trikha Rani Das</b>	150
○ Entrepreneurial Exposure of Women Entrepreneur of Assam: A Study Based on the Identification of Stumbling Block of Women Entrepreneurs of Assam <b>Anupam Dutta, Rina Adak</b>	154

○ Formation of Woman Identity: A Feminist Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> <b>Swastika Nath</b>	161
○ Women in Medieval Assam: A Historical Analysis <b>Tinamoni Rajkumari</b>	165
○ Women Empowerment in India: A Study through Self-Help Groups <b>Ankita Kotoky</b>	169
○ Delineation of the Female Experience in <i>The Forest of Enchantments</i> <b>Suvam Nath Sharma</b>	174
○ Gender Discrimination and Its Impacts on Women Empowerment <b>Mehbubur Rahman Choudhury</b>	178
○ Women Empowerment and Social Change <b>Sultana Khanam Mozumder</b>	185
○ Gendering the Covid-19 Pandemic <b>Manjuma Sonowal</b>	190
○ The Issues of Poverty and Gender Inequality: A Study of Developing Countries <b>Bikash Das</b>	195
○ A Vigorous Women Voice Against Witchcraft in Assam <b>Ananta Chetia</b>	200
○ The Courtesan Life Seen Through Premchand's <i>Sevasadan</i> and Ruswa's <i>Umrao Jan Ada</i> <b>Pallavi Bokotial</b>	206
○ A Study on the Cause and Effect of Early Marriage in Indian Society: With Special Reference to Dhemaji District of Assam <b>Mrinali Narzari</b>	210
○ অৰুপা পটঙ্গীয়া কলিতাৰ চুটিগল্পত সামাজিক লিংগৰ প্ৰসংগ (প্ৰস্তাৱনা গল্পৰ আধাৰত) উৎপল মেচ	211
○ মামণি বয়ছমৰ আত্মকথনত নাৰীৰ জীৱন আৰু যত্ননা মনোজ ভূঞা	220
○ সামাজিক লিংগ নিৰ্মাণৰ দৃষ্টিভংগীৰে অসমীয়া সাধুকথাত নাৰী বিনীতা চেতিয়া	225
○ পুৰুষৰ দৃষ্টিত নাৰী ("ৰূপালীম" নাটকৰ উল্লিখনেৰে) বাগ্নিতা বৰা	230
○ লিংগ আধাৰিত শ্ৰমৰ বিভাজন সম্পৰ্কে যুৱ-সমাজৰ দৃষ্টিভংগী : অসমীয়া সমাজ-সংস্কৃতিৰ বিশেষ প্ৰসংগসহ এক চমু সমীক্ষা মৃদুল মৰাণ	233
○ অসমীয়া ফকৰা-যোজনা, প্ৰবাদ-প্ৰবচনত নাৰী চয়নিকা গোহাঁই	237
○ য়েছে দৰজে ঠংচিৰ 'বিষকন্যাৰ দেশত' উপন্যাস : নাৰীকেন্দ্ৰিক কুসংস্কাৰৰ বিৰুদ্ধে এক প্ৰতিবাদ ভাগ্যশ্ৰী গগৈ	246
○ জ্যোতিপ্ৰসাদ আগৰৱালাৰ নাটকৰ 'শেৱালি' আৰু 'ৰূপালীম' চৰিত্ৰৰ তুলনামূলক আলোচনা অংকনা বৰগোহাঁই	252

- মনোরঞ্জন ব্যাপারীর উপন্যাস 'ছেড়া ছেড়া জীবন': প্রায়িকায়িত নারী জীবনের সংক্ৰমণ  
আব্দুল জলীল চৌধুরী 256
- নারীর মৰ্যাদা রক্ষার দাবিতে 'মনঃসংহিতা': পুনঃ অবলোকন (প্রথম পর্ব)  
শেলী দত্ত 261
- অৰুপা পটঙ্গীয়া কলিতাৰ 'মৃগনাভি' উপন্যাসত নারীৰ সামাজিক স্থিতি  
মৃগালী পেণ্ড 267
- অসমীয়া লোকগীতত নারী  
বৰ্ণালী শইকীয়া 270
- নিৰুপমা বৰগোহাঞিৰ 'অভিযাত্রী' উপন্যাসত প্রতিফলিত চন্দ্রপ্রভা শইকীয়ানীৰ জীবন চিত্ৰণ  
ডালিমী পাঠক 274
- জ্ঞান পূজাৰীৰ কবিতাত বিষয়ীৰ (Subjectivity) প্রশ্ন হিচাপে নারী : 'পানীৰঙৰ জলবুঁবকী'ৰ মাজেৰে  
এটি পাঠ  
সুদক্ষণা গগৈ 278
- 'গহিন গাও' উপন্যাসে নারী চৰিত্ৰ : নিম্নবৰ্গীয় দৃষ্টিকোন থেকে  
ড° নীতিশ দাস 283
- মনোজ মিত্ৰের নাটকে নিম্নবৰ্গ সমাজ : একটি সমীক্ষা  
মোঃ আজহারউদ্দিন 288
- নিম্নবৰ্গের আলোক বেবেশ রায়েৰ উপন্যাসেৰ 'মাদাৰিৰ মা'ও 'টুলটুলি' চৰিত্ৰ  
জানকী প্রসাদ দেবনাথ 295
- কুন্দনন্দিনী ও রোহিণী : বিধবা নারীৰ অন্তৰ্দহন  
বাসব দাস 300
- লিংগ বৈষম্য আৰু আমাৰ সমাজ  
মাইকেল টায়ে 305
- भारतीय नारी और समाज : अतीत और वर्तमान  
जोनटि दुवरा 307
- प्रमा खेतान के उपन्यासों में मनोवैज्ञानिकता  
हिटलर सिंह 310

# The Issues of Poverty and Gender Inequality: A Study of Developing Countries

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## **Introduction**

Poverty and Gender inequality are two major social problems across the World. Especially in the developing countries the issues of poverty and Gender inequality are worsening the socio-economic condition of the people. Approximately two-thirds of the World's populations live in poverty. These poor people are said to live in countries that are not yet developed. These include some regions in Latin America, some parts of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of these countries are less developed than others and are referred to as "Least Developed Countries" (World Bank, 2009). According to the World Bank, the problem of global poverty continues to be one of enormous magnitude. Of the world's 7 billion people, almost half populated in Sub-Saharan Africa, some regions in Asia, central America and the Caribbean live on less than \$2 a day, while 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 a day (World Bank, 2009). Poverty, especially, maternal poverty affects infant mortality. 6% of infants die before age 1 and 8% barely make it to age 4 (World Bank, 2009). In the developing poor countries, the poor falls into four kinds of traps – the conflict trap, the natural resource trap, the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbours, and the trap of bad governance in a developing poor country. Lack of education may exacerbate poverty. According to the World Bank, out of those who make it to school age, 9% of boys and 14% of girls do not have access to elementary education (World Bank, 2009). According to UNESCO report with regard to Education for All (EFA) assessment, out of an estimated 113 million children of school going age, 60% of girls between ages 6 and 11 were not enrolled in school. 87% of these girls live in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), South and West Africa, the Arab region and North Africa (UNESCO, 2000).

## **Objectives:**

The major objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To examine the issues of poverty and gender inequality in developing countries.
2. To discuss various dimensions of poverty and gender inequality in the developing countries.
3. To study the policies regarding the issues of poverty and gender inequality in less developed countries.

## **Literature Review:**

There are various perceptions and significant differences in how poverty and gender inequality are perceived and measured. The perception determines which approaches are appropriate to use to address gender poverty in developing countries. The World Bank's definition of Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty and its categorization of people living on less than \$1.25 (extreme poverty) or less than U.S.\$2.00 per day (average poverty) make up the international poverty line (World Bank, 2009). Linking poverty to economic causes,

the World Bank prescribes various ways to look at poverty, its eradication, and its measurement. Researchers on the issue have written about various ways to address gender poverty and inequality based on different perspectives which are based on diverse measurements (Morazes&Pintak, 2007; Watkins, 2005).

#### **Definition of Poverty:**

Poverty refers to lacking enough resources to provide the necessities of life—food, clean water, shelter and clothing. But in today's world, that can be extended to include access to health care, education and even transportation. In government circles, poverty is often further defined as "absolute poverty" and "relative poverty". Every country has its own measure for poverty. However, a widely recognized authority on the topic of "extreme poverty" is the World Bank. The Bank keeps a metric called the International Poverty Line and, as of 2015, set the definition of extreme poverty as those who live on less than US\$1.90 per day. (Those living on between \$1.90-\$3.10 per day are classified as the "moderate poor.") This number is based on the monetary value of a person's consumption rather than income alone.

#### **What is a Developing Country:**

Developing countries are countries with economies that have a low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and rely heavily on agriculture as the primary industry. When it comes to regions of the world, developing countries have not quite reached economic maturity, although there's a wide array of different definitions. A developing country is generally defined to a certain degree by its economic output. There has been much debate around where to draw the line between a developed and developing country, which is evident by the lack of a universal definition. example, the United Nations has conventions for distinguishing between developed and developing countries, and the World Bank has stopped using such terms in favour of low-income economy, lower-middle-income economy, and so on based on gross national income (GNI) per capita. World Bank has a more concrete methodology that considers countries with a per capita income of less than \$1,035 in 2019 as low-income economies. The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) definition is often considered the most comprehensive measure. It considers per capita income, export diversification, and the degree of integration into the global financial system.

#### **Gender inequality:**

Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive form of inequality in the world. It denies women, their voices, devalues their work, make women's position unequal to men's from the household to the national and global levels. Despite some important progress to change this in recent years, in no country women have achieved economic equality with men, and women are still more likely than men to live in poverty. Especially in the developing countries the degree of gender inequality is higher in comparison to the developed countries. Across the world, women are in the lowest-paid work. Globally, they earn 24% less than men and at the current rate of progress, it will take 170 years to close the gap. 700 million women in developing regions are in the informal economy - where they are less likely to have employment contracts, legal rights or social protection, and are often not paid enough to escape poverty. 600 million are in the most insecure and precarious forms of work. Women do at least twice as much unpaid care work, such as childcare and housework, as men - sometimes 10 times as much, often on top of their paid work. The value of this work each year is estimated at least \$10.8 trillion. Women work longer days than men when paid and unpaid work is counted together.

#### **Economic Dimensions of Gender Poverty and Inequality:**

In both formal and informal types of work, there are barriers to female involvement in paid work which contributes to gender poverty. Morrison, Raju, and Sinha (2007) indicate that factors such as a woman's age, education, and number of children at home, family income and wealth" (p. 9) can lead to gender poverty and inequality. In a study by Morrison and Lamana (2006), women report responsibilities such as housework, child care, and taking care of elderly or sick people as factors that hinder their labour force participation. Thus, 24.8% of women report their involvement in care activities, compared with only 1.5% of men involved in similar activities (Morrison, Raju, and Sinha (2007)). Morrison et al. (2007) classify work into five types as follows: "formal market work, informal market work, subsistence production, unpaid care work and volunteer work" (p.9). When examining women's involvement in work activities in developing nations, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, women are unemployed. Concerning male to female work involvement, female involvement is at 37% in the MENA region in contrast to 83% in East Asia; however, women tend to be involved in farming and non-farming related ventures (Morrison et al., 2007). Moussa (2008) argues that poverty affects women the more and it affects women and impact economic growth. The income gap between the genders as a result of discrimination against women worsens women's poverty.

#### **Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Poverty and Inequality:**

Poverty and gender inequality can be examined from the perspective of Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions. This analysis will utilize two concepts of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hofstede (2003) introduced the 'PDI' and the 'IDV': the Power Distance Index and Individualism. The 'PDI' measures power inequalities - it connotes an authority figure and a subordinate. Inequalities exist in societies that depend on hierarchies. These hierarchies are based on societal values which exist in high PDI societies. In such societies, people value a public or collective relationship which takes precedence over personal problems, so group norms exist instead. The IDV, on the other hand, emphasizes individualism over collective goals. In individualistic societies, people focus on themselves and their behavior while attitudes, values, and beliefs are more important to them than societal goals. Income, career goals, and independence are values that they cherish. Hofstede (2003) contends that developed countries tend to be individualistic, whereas poor developing countries tend to be communal or share their collective goals. Based on Hofstede's analysis, it may be argued that, societal values may explain gender inequality in some parts of the developing world due to a clash of values pertaining to gender based reforms. Utilizing the 2005 Human Development Report on education and work opportunities in 53 countries, Cheung and Chang (2007) concluded that education, career, and female income is impacted more particularly when unequal treatment of different gendered individuals limits education and work opportunities for females.

#### **International Response:**

In many developing countries, eradication of both male dominance in various sectors of societies and discrimination against women is an issue that the United Nations support. The Beijing World Conference on Women held in 1995 was a United Nations response to the issue. The concept of gender mainstreaming emerged as a way to bridge the gender gap by bringing about reforms geared toward education and awareness of gender issues. The United Nations, in its efforts to eradicate gender poverty and inequality, dedicated a decade



– from 1975 to 1985 as a period for seeking to improve the welfare of women (UN Development Fund for Women, 2005).

#### **Social Welfare Policy Dimensions:**

Embracing gender equity and poverty policy programs in many parts of the developing world meant that governmental programs should be designed to address the issues identified. In the late 1980s women's groups emerged. For example, the Korea Women's Movement worked with their legislature to influence policy changes (Suh, 2011). They increased their membership and formed alliances with political decision makers to bring reforms for equal rights. During the democratization process, women laborers and low wage workers joined forces with women intellectuals and brought the issues affecting women to the legislature. Through women's representation, the Korean Women's Movements achieved gender rights in formal politics and were able to address issues of inequality (Suh, 2011). Some countries, such as Korea, have achieved some success; however, other regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Middle Eastern and North Africa face some challenges.

#### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):**

In September 2000, many representative governments of the United Nations had a summit in New York where they adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a guide for policy makers to address the identified MDGs by the year 2015. At a Dakar conference, member governments made a commitment to the Education for All (EFA) policy.

The New York summit on the MDGs identified eight goals in specific areas that seek the well-being of citizens in member nations based on the Poverty Reduction Strategy document (GPRS). (Lewin, 2009; Muhanguzi, 2011; Nwadigwé, 2007; Parimala, 2008).

- (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- (2) achieve universal primary education;
- (3) promote gender equality and empower women;
- (4) reduce child mortality;
- (5) improve maternal health;
- (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and,
- (8) develop a global partnership for development. (United Nations, 2008).

#### **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs):**

In an effort to address gender poverty and inequality, and consistent with UNESCO policy guidelines and the General Assembly of the United Nations, the year 1996 was declared as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (IYEP). Developing countries promoted the Education for All (EFA) program as a vital way to reduce the root cause of poverty. For example, Ghana's government also signed a memorandum of understanding with the World Food Program (WFP) to feed school children in underserved school districts, as well as introduced the capitation grant to help alleviate primary school cost and encourage vulnerable families to keep their children in school. Also, governmental efforts in the early 1990s initiated the Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program to broaden education access to all school-aged children. All these programs in place, the evidence shows a continued gender disparity in education and employment (Tagoe, 2011).

#### **Conclusion:**

From the above analysis we can conclude that the gender inequality and poverty are some major issues in developing countries, especially in the Asian and African countries. Most of the people in those countries are still living below poverty line. The issue of gender inequality is interlinked with the problem of poverty in developing countries. Future researchers should explore anti-poverty measures other than institutional responses in order to address family poverty. Further research is necessary in the areas of family poverty and its impact on girls' education. A longitudinal study of the socio-economic status of mothers and daughters is needed. It is essential to explore women's health inequality in developing countries and how it impacts female reproductive health. All forms of gender violence needs to be explored around how they impact females. A qualitative study of women's perspectives on reproductive rights is very necessary.

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ISBN 978-81-948854-7-4



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