

Conference Report

International Conference on

“Breaking Barriers, Building Inclusive Spaces: Challenges and Strategies to Address Gender Disparities”

Organized by Asha Paras for Peace and Harmony Foundation and VED Foundation India

15th to 17th November 2025

1. Introduction

The International Conference on “Breaking Barriers, Building Inclusive Spaces: Challenges and Strategies to Address Gender Disparities” provided an academic and interdisciplinary platform to examine continuing gender disparities in education, employment, healthcare, representation, safety and economic participation. The conference emphasized that meaningful inclusion requires attention to gender together with caste, class, identity and other forms of social marginalization. It also highlighted the importance of collaboration among academia, government, civil society, industry and communities.



Join three days

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING INCLUSIVE SPACES-CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS GENDER DISPARITIES

15 – 17 Nov 2025 | 5.30 – 9.00 pm (IST)

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2. Inaugural Session and Keynote Address

The inaugural session was coordinated by Dr. Jaya Phookan, who welcomed the dignitaries and participants and introduced the conference theme. Dr. Ermala Dayal delivered the welcome address and introduced the Chief Guest, Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh (Retd.), Keynote Speaker Professor Diana J. Fox, Professor Sabiha Hussain and the organizing leadership. Professor Asha Shukla was acknowledged for her leadership and

contribution to the organization of the conference.

Professor Sabiha Hussain emphasized the need to advance equality and inclusion for every individual irrespective of gender, class or identity. She highlighted intersectional gender diversity, inclusive leadership, the role of men and boys in transforming social attitudes, and the opportunities and risks presented by technology. She also stressed the importance of partnerships across government, civil society, academia and the private sector.

In her keynote address, Professor Diana J. Fox presented gender equity as a sustainable development and economic concern. She discussed unequal participation in paid work,

unpaid care responsibilities, low-wage and precarious employment, and barriers affecting girls' education, including gender-based violence, child marriage, early pregnancy, period poverty and limited participation in STEM. She emphasized partnership-based approaches in which communities and marginalized groups participate as co-creators of knowledge and solutions.

3. Gender Equality, Security and Institutional Inclusion

Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh (Retd.) discussed gender equality from the perspective of the armed forces and organizational development. His presentation addressed the expanding participation of women in the Indian armed forces and the importance of professional opportunities, safe working environments, education, leadership, family support and appropriate institutional safeguards. The discussion underlined that inclusive organizations require both formal opportunities and respectful workplace cultures.

The conference also recognized that gender equality is connected with wider questions of social attitudes and institutional practices. Speakers stressed that stereotypes are learned and can therefore be challenged through education, awareness and sustained engagement, including with boys and men.

4. Gender Disparities in Employment and Education

A dedicated session examined gender disparities in employment and education. Dr. Kamalaveni DWS discussed opportunities and challenges for women in India's gig economy. She noted potential benefits such as flexibility, income generation, financial independence and digital inclusion, while identifying safety concerns, harassment, income instability, limited social security, the digital divide and gender stereotyping as important challenges. She called for supportive policies, social-security mechanisms and effective prevention of harassment.

Dr. Jitendra Pandey discussed persistent gender stereotypes and the cultural assignment of domestic responsibilities to women. Professor Vibhuti Patel highlighted women's economic rights, unpaid care work, education, workforce participation, childcare and safe transport. Professor R.K. Shukla emphasized gender-inclusive curricula, skill development, women's participation in non-traditional occupations and gender-responsive workplace policies. Dr. Ruby Oja highlighted the importance of policy support, STEM education, vocational skills, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for women.

Across the discussions, education emerged as a key instrument for challenging traditional gender roles and expanding economic and social opportunities. Speakers also emphasized that policies need effective implementation and should be supported by institutional mechanisms that enable women and marginalized groups to participate meaningfully.

5. Major Recommendations

- Strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive education, including STEM, vocational and skill-development opportunities.
- Improve implementation of existing laws and policies relating to equality, education, workplace safety and social protection.
- Recognize unpaid care work and strengthen childcare, elderly-care, family-support and family-friendly workplace arrangements.
- Improve safety, social security and harassment-prevention mechanisms for women in gig work and other non-traditional employment.
- Engage men and boys in awareness and educational initiatives to address gender stereotypes and discriminatory social attitudes.
- Promote partnerships among government, academia, civil society, industry and grassroots communities, with lived experience included in decision-making.
- Encourage inclusive leadership and meaningful participation of diverse and marginalized groups in institutions and public life.

6. Conclusion

The conference brought together diverse academic and professional perspectives on gender disparities and inclusive spaces. The deliberations demonstrated that gender equality is interconnected with education, employment, economic participation, safety, leadership, technology and social attitudes. The conference therefore emphasized a practical and collaborative approach based on education, effective policy implementation, social protection, institutional responsibility and community participation. The discussions provide a useful foundation for continued research, awareness initiatives, partnerships and action towards more inclusive and equitable social institutions.

Source Note: This report has been prepared from the conference proceedings/transcript supplied for documentation and summarizes the themes, presentations and recommendations contained therein.

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