

Gender discrimination in India- issues, strategy and Management

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Abstract - Gender discrimination in India- issues and strategy Lipismita Nath, Lecture on Contract. Dikhowmukh College. Women constitute almost half the human race. For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. Now-a-days, as per constitutional and legal provision, the Indian women enjoy a unique status of equality. The constitution of India has included several articles on the protection of the rights of women in the Article 14, Article 15, and Article 16. As for example, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 etc. Development process in the state is not gender neutral; women enjoy inferior status as compared to the average women in India. Gender discrimination is a crucial issue to be discussed. Various policies are introduced to solve the problems of gender discrimination. This paper is an attempt to some issues relating to gender discrimination and its management.

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of sources indicate that women generally occupy a lower social status than men in India (The Toronto Star 4 Feb. 1993, A17; Liddle and Joshi 1986, 177-185; BCTWLJ 1993, 63; IHDSF 15-18 Feb. 1988, 8). In traditional Hindu law, the son is the "sole object of worship" and the daughter is to be "despised and detested" (ibid.). There is a marked preference for boy children (NPR 11 Sept. 1994; The New York Times 27 Aug. 1994; Kelkar 1992, 81). One of the reasons given for this preference is that "... a girl is paraya dhan (some one else's wealth)" as she, and everything invested in her training or education, is lost when she moves to her husband's home upon marriage (Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women 1989, 4). The differences between women and men, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes. The Global Gender Gap measure was introduced by the World Economic Forum to examine four critical areas of inequality between men and women:

1. **Economic participation and opportunity** – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment
2. **Educational attainment** – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education
3. **Political empowerment** – outcomes on representation in decision-making structures
4. **Health and survival** – outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio

The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they are dividing their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources and opportunities. India ranks 123 in terms of economic participation, 121 in educational attainment, 134 in health and survival and 17 in political empowerment. India, with 1.3 million elected women representatives, has the largest number of women participating in local governance among the Asian countries, exceeding its own 33% reservation.

II. INTERNATIONAL INDICATORS

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

A framework for incorporating gender equality across the MDGs: Many practitioners and policymakers agree that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the achievement of each of the MDGs, and the extent to which the other goals address gender-based constraints.

The Gender-related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure

It adjusts the Human Development Index (HDI) for gender inequalities in the three dimensions covered by the Human Development Index (HDI), i.e. life expectancy, education, and income. It is important to note that the GDI is not specifically a measure of gender inequality. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) seeks to measure relative female representation in economic and political power. It considers gender gaps in political representation, in professional and management positions in the economy, as well as gender gaps in incomes.

International composite indices

It to measure gender equality have been developed, partly to complement and expand on the GDI and GEM. For example, Social Watch's Gender Equity Index (GEI) combines indicators from both the GDI and GEM, with a separate gender equality rating estimated for three dimensions (Social Watch 2005):

- **Education:** measured by the literacy gap between men and women and by male and female enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- **Participation in the economy:** measured by the percentage of women and men in paid jobs, excluding agriculture, and by the income ratio of men to women.
- **Empowerment:** measured by the percentage of women in professional, technical, managerial and administrative jobs, and by the number of seats women have in parliament and in decision-making ministerial posts.

III. GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND GAP IN INDIA

Educational Sector

There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001–2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

Children's school attendance

- Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys' age 6-17 years are attending school. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1,000 boys.
- There is gender equality in school attendance in urban areas; but, in rural areas, the female disadvantage in education is marked and increases with age.

Literacy and educational attainment among adults

- Forty-one percent of women and 18% of men age 15-49 have never been to school.
- Educational attainment remains very low: even among the 20-29 age group, only 27% of women and 39% of men have 10 or more years of education.

Health Sector

Discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 943 women to 1,000 men (Census 2011). This is attributed to the cultural bias in favour of male children, which results in the abortion of female foetuses. Other causes are the social neglect of women and girls, manifested in less access to nutrition and healthcare, and in high maternal mortality. Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world, at 385-487 per 100,000 live births. Close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one-third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy.

Economic Sector

Women, as half of the human capital of India, will need to be more efficiently integrated into the economy in order to boost India's long term competitive potential. The census does not accurately identify many activities as work that women actually do to enable their families to survive collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working on family land etc. Women also work in home-based industries, bidi and agarbatti-rolling, bangle-making, weaving, etc. They do not get social security benefits and are paid very low wages for this informal work. One-third of agricultural workers are women. On an average, their wages are 30% lower than men's wages. Women find it difficult to get credit from banking institutions because they are often unable to provide collateral. They get much smaller loan amounts even though their repayment record is much better than that of men. Women's right to land and other assets is weak. Though legislation has been introduced to ensure that women share equally in ancestral property, enforcing such rights in a patriarchal society requires resources that poor women may not have.

IV. STRATEGY FOR MINIMIZING GENDER GAP AND EMPOWERING THE FEMALE

National Mission for Empowerment of Women India

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GOI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with a view to empower women socially, economically and educationally. The Mission aims to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments of Government of India as well as State Governments. The Mission utilises existing structural arrangements of participating Ministries wherever available and partners with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in implementation of activities. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

Focus areas of the Mission

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12
- Higher and Professional education for girls/women
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women

Economic empowerment

The Twelfth Plan endeavors to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It will improve the conditions of self employed women. Focus will be on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

Skill development

One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development from traditional skills to emerging skills, which

help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. Training of women as BPO employees, electronic technicians, electricians, plumbers, sales persons, auto drivers, taxi drivers, masons, and so on will be incorporated in the skill development programmes. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women.

According to National Statistical Commission Chairman Pronab Sen, rural women are shifting towards self-help groups and self-employment, which is clear from the percentage of women taking up self-employment rising to 59 per cent in 2011-12 from 56 per cent in 2009-10. Also, it could also be that a large segment of rural women are not being categorised in the employable workforce in the WPR, as their activity may be designated as family household chores (Ashok Gupta 2013). John Coonrod (2013) has suggested the following ways in which programs need to be designed to help and empower women and minimizing the gender gap.

1. **Gender analysis.** Too often, gender is an afterthought in project design. Often, mid-project it is discovered that women are not participating and then steps are taken to empower women to participate in a program that simply does not work for them, only adding further burden and anxiety.
2. **Rights awareness.** Many of the women are confined to their households and lack mobility and freedom of association and have no opportunity to learn their rights and take action to improve their lives and those of their family members. Even if they are aware they are not culturally tuned to assert themselves.
3. **Equal leadership.** Women are denied a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Leadership among women can be greatly accelerated by mentoring, building an organized constituency among the women of the community, leadership training and building federations with other women leaders.
4. **Organize.** Investments in building strong grassroots women's organizations, federations and cooperatives provide women sustainable platforms for advocacy and mutual empowerment.
5. **Functional Literacy.** Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women.
6. **Financial services.** Women need credit not only for starting or supporting small enterprises, but also for coping with great seasonal fluctuations in family income. Several studies have shown that women spend money, on the health, nutrition and education of children than when men control the money.

Women in the Workforce

The Constitution of India contains a number of provisions of benefit to women in the workplace. Article 16 (1) of the constitution prohibits sex discrimination in matters relating to employment or appointment to government jobs, while article 39(d) supports the principle of equal pay for equal work. Article 42 makes clear the state's obligation to "make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. Two pieces of legislation that directly address the situation of women in the workforce are the 1961 Maternity Benefit Act and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. The Maternity Benefit Act prohibits employers from requiring that women work while pregnant and requires that they provide 12 weeks paid maternity leave and breaks for working mothers to nurse their children. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and Equal Remuneration (Amendment) Act 1987 not only oblige an employer to pay men and women equally for the same work or "work of a similar nature," but also prohibit discriminatory practices in hiring, training and promotions.

Women in Political Life

Women were granted the right to vote. Their representation in government is approximately ten per cent in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha or upper house) and approximately seven per cent in the House of the People (Lok Sabha or lower house) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1991, 98-99; see also UNDP 1992, 145). Despite their low numbers in government, women have been highly visible participants in Indian politics although some sources point out that women politicians are frequently not representative of Indian women as a whole (CSR Newsletter Sept. 1993, 7; Women in Action 1994, 15). A May 1993 study on women parliamentarians concluded that "not many women from the grass-roots level are coming up to the National Legislature" (CSR Newsletter Sept. 1993, 7). Vibhuti Patel, in an article in Women in Action (published by ISIS, an international women's rights organization which coordinates the International Feminist Network), writes that most women wanting to enter politics face opposition from family, community and male political leaders.

Education Issues

Section 45 of the Constitution requires the Indian government to undertake a programme of compulsory education for everyone up to the age of fourteen (Blaustein Oct. 1990, 64). Tamil Nadu is the only Indian state that has indicated it will introduce legislation to enforce this requirement (Child Asia 1993a, 9; The National Journal 25 June 1994, 1510), although, according to Joseph Gathia of the Centre of Concern for Child Labour in New Delhi, it had not yet done as of August 1994. The state has, however, passed a bill that imposes a fine on parents who do not send their children under 14 to school.

Health Issues

The preference for male children has an impact on female health care (Calman 1992). Parents often give nutritional and health care priority to male children Girls receive less breast milk, are weaned earlier, are given less food and receive medical services less frequently (The Toronto Star 4 Feb. 1993, A17; ILSA Journal of International Law 1992, 112). In addition, there is a marked disparity between male and female infant mortality rates (Country Reports 1992 1993, 1144). Various programs are introduced for the benefit of the female groups in India in post-independence period.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, gender discrimination cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women. Various policies must be implemented in a better way. Since women are integral part of the society, the gender gap must be minimized with holistic approach.

