

GENDER DISCRIMINATION : CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND POLICIES

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Abstract: Gender is a common term where as gender discrimination is meant only for women, because females are the only victims of gender discrimination. Females are nearly 50 percent of the total population but their representation in public life is very low. Recognizing women's right and believing their ability are essential for women's empowerment and development. The gender and development approach, through gender analysis, seeks to understand the roles, responsibilities, resources and priorities of women and men within a specific context, examining the social, economic and environmental factors which influence their roles and decision-making capacity. The gender discriminated belief is repeatedly recognized merely at the stage of the gender system's impact on women. The practice of male-female differentiation results in structural deprivation of the female of life.

Gender discrimination is very common at global level and especially in India. These practices are harmful to the dignity and overall development of women. This study deals with gender discrimination in India, its various forms and its causes. Importance of women in development, legislation for women and solution for gender discrimination are also discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Women's Development, Education, Employment, Economic Independence, Empowerment, Decision Making.

INTRODUCTION

Females are nearly 50 per cent of the total population but their representation in public life is very low. Woman continues to bear the major load of the household work. Her primary role is often viewed by the society as housewife. In cardinal goals of democracy "of the people, by the people and for the people" cannot be optimally accomplished if the female population remains out of political empowerment. Subordination of women in society acts a structural constraint to their participation in political activities. This constraint operates more or less for all classes and communities of women. Prevalent culture which is very complicated and often decisions are taken behind the scene may be regarded as another constraint in this regard. Recognising women's rights and believing their ability are essential for women's empowerment and development. Females should realize their own capabilities and potentials which will strengthen their self image and foster them with confidence to take action in life. Political empowerment does not imply just a right to role silently but to discuss, share and empower politics by knowing its pros and cons and thereby to influence policies and decision making. Empowering women is the basic to the basics of human rights where she wants neither to beg for power nor search for power hierarchy to exercise power against others. On the contrary she demands to be accepted as human first of all. She as a person in command of herself and for that necessarily all the resources physical, social, economical, political, cultural and spiritual to be equally accessible to her, are prerequisites for considering the whole question of empowerment. Indian society is inherited with male chauvinism but now the society has started to realize women's importance and has being accepted women's empowerment, women as an active agent for development, participation in and guiding their own development.

Half of the world's population is females. They are doing two-third of work of the total work in the world but

received only one-tenth of the world's total income. Nearly two-third of the women is illiterates and they have possessed only one percent of the total world's assets. In the world only one-fourth of the families are headed by female. India is a male dominant society and gender discrimination is customised habitually. Present paper mainly focuses on gender discrimination, its causes, consequences and related policies. Gender discrimination is very common at global level and especially in India. These practices are harmful to the dignity and overall development of women. Present paper also examines the role of laws & policy reforms in decisions related to gender justice that influence the quality life of women in India.

Amartya Sen points out that when he took up issues of women's welfare, he was accused in India of voicing "foreign concerns." "I was told Indian women don't think like that about equality. But I would like to argue that if they don't think like that they should be given a real opportunity to think like that. (Parmita Shastri, Outlook India, 1998)

Gender discrimination and women's development is a greatly discuss matter, even though sensitization regarding this subject is grossly ignored on the lower level. Gender discrimination and women's development is a greatly discuss matter, even though sensitization regarding this subject is grossly ignored on the lower level. The gender and development approach, through gender analysis, seeks to understand the roles, responsibilities, resources and priorities of women and men within a specific context, examining the social, economic and environmental factors which influence their roles and decision-making capacity. The gender discriminated belief is repeatedly recognized merely at the stage of the gender system's impact on women. The practice of male-female differentiation results in structural deprivation of the female of life. (Dagar Rainuka, 1998, pp, 38).

DISCRIMINATIONS

From web to death females are facing lots of discrimination against them. Some of them are :-

- Abortion of female gravida with the help of scanning.
- Feoticide (By giving liquid extract from cactus / opuntia, giving raw paddy to new born female baby, by pressing the face by pillow or by breaking the female baby's neck)
- Not giving enough and nutritious food
- Not allowing to go to school (Denial of education)
- Not giving needy health care while in ill health
- Early marriage
- Eve teasing, Rape and Sexual harassment
- Dowry
- Divorce, Destitution even for silly or without any reason.

Gender inequality exists in most parts of the world, from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to the United States of America. However, inequality between women and men can take very many different forms. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems. Amartya Sen also pointed out gender discrimination through the way of professional incompetence. In terms of employment as well as promotion in work and occupation, women often face greater handicap than men. (Sen Amartya, Nov. 09, 2001, pp,1)

UN Convention on the elimination of all sorts of discrimination against women Part-1, Article 3 says that the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

19-May-2006)

CAUSES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

The causes of gender discrimination are :-

- Educational backwardness
- Caste
- Religious beliefs
- Culture
- On the name of family history
- Customs and beliefs
- Races
- Low income
- Unemployment
- Society
- Family situation and
- Attitudes

Like male or even above them female plays important role in the family and national development. But her contribution is not recognized by the male dominant society.

The study discusses causational factors like education that has played as an important role for this menace. It is found that the young girls who are not attending school and are mostly discriminated due to their lack of awareness, lack of self-confidence and proper understanding and vision. The figures only show how in most regions of the world, specially the developing societies, gender bias impinges on girls' education. The foremost factor limiting female education is poverty. Economics plays a key role when it comes to coping with direct costs such as tuition fees, cost of textbooks, uniforms, transportation and other expenses. Wherever, especially in families with many children, these costs exceed the income of the family, girls are the first to be denied schooling. (Geeta Sharma, 2006, pp-1) Supporting the logic of patriarchy that women have different social roles, their conduct and values are governed by norms such as chastity, femininity and parda, which restricts women's access to education. Society has also this misconception that education provides exposure to girls which spoils them. Poverty and lack of awareness also hinder mothers from giving adequate care for their children.

Gender discrimination has its own negative consequences, women and girls are still the poorest, least educated, most unhealthy, and most marginalized segment of the world's population. Women lack control of economic assets and often lack opportunities for education and training. These factors intensify women's poverty, heighten their vulnerability to violence, increase their health risks, and undermine their human rights. (ICRW, 2002, pp-1)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sonalde Desai (1994) observed that parents' reluctance to educate daughters has its roots in the situation of women. Parents have several incentives for not educating their daughters. Foremost is the view that education of girls brings no returns to parents and that their future roles, being mainly reproductive and perhaps including agricultural labor, require no formal education.

Kalyani Menon Sen and A.K. Shivakumar (2001) found that girls in India are discriminated against in several ways – fewer months of breastfeeding, less of nurturing and play, less care or medical treatment if they fall ill, less of "special"

food, less of parental attention. As a result, girls are far more susceptible than boys to disease and infections, leading to poor health and a shorter lifespan. It is this life-long discrimination in nurturing and care that is the real killer of girls – less visible and dramatic, but as unequivocally lethal as female foeticide and infanticide.

Berta Esteve – Volart (2004) described that gender discrimination against women in the market place reduces the available talent in an economy, which has negative economic consequences. Gender discrimination takes many forms. Many social practices seen as normal from a religious or cultural point of view (which may have deep historical roots) have women out of the economic mainstream. These social practices may have profound economic consequences because they do not allow society to take advantage of the talent inherent in women.

Anna-Maria Lind (2006) stated that India’s population still leads traditional lives in rural areas. Religious laws and traditions still determine the lives of many people, particularly women. Even if women are formerly entitled to own land and resources social and religious factors make many women refrain from this right in order not to cause distortions within the family. The preference for having sons permeates all social classes in India, which sets the standard for girls throughout their entire lives.

GOI Planning Commission (2008) indicated that discrimination against women and girls impinges upon their right to health and manifests itself in the form of worsening health and nutrition indices. Thus, India continuous to grapple with unacceptably high MMR, IMB, and increasing rates of anemia, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS among women.

Julie Mullin (2008) indicated that the developing world is full of poverty stricken families who see their daughters as an economic predicament. That attitude has resulted in the widespread neglect to baby girls in Africa, Asia and South America. In many communities, it’s a regular practice to breastfeed girls for a shorter time than boys so that women can try to get pregnant again with a boy as soon as possible. As a result, girls miss out on life-giving nutrition during a crucial window of their development, which stunts their growth and weakens their resistance to disease.

NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

There are some major areas of discrimination against women in India and the impact pertains to the manifestation of gender ideology in declining sex-ratio, Illiteracy, Poor health, Overwork, Unskilled, Mistreatment & Professional inequality, Ownership inequality etc. are the visible aspects of the gender system. In this regard Amartya Sen very nicely pointed out his above referred essay different kinds of disparity like -

SEX-RATIO: Sex ratio, defined, as the number of females per thousand males is an important social indicator to measure the extent of prevailing equality between males and females in a society at a given point of time. The sex ratio in the country had always remained unfavorable to females. It was 972 at the beginning of the twentieth century and thereafter showed continuous decline until 1941. The sex ratio from 1901-2011 is given in Table no.1

Table no.1 Sex Ratio: 1901- 2011

| Census year | Sex ratio (Females per 1000 males) |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1901 | 972 |
| 1911 | 964 |
| 1921 | 955 |
| 1931 | 950 |
| 1941 | 945 |
| 1951 | 946 |
| 1961 | 941 |
| 1971 | 930 |
| 1981 | 934 |
| 1991 | 927 |
| 2001 | 933 |
| 2011 | 940 |

Source- Provisional Population Totals, Census of India- 2011.

There is a visible correlation between the growth in incidence and the sex ratio of the country. In India we have fewer females than males. After getting freedom an over all development has shown in every field like rate of literacy, mortality rate, economic growth but inspite of all sort of development population of women becoming fewer to fewer.(Crime In India- 1995). It is slightly improved. But question is why there are fewer women than men in India? And why this situation differs from Kerala to Madhya pradesh? Mortality inequality has been observed extensively in North Africa and in Asia, including China and South Asia. (Sen Amartya, Nov. 09, 2001, pp, 1)

EDUCATION: Education is widely recognized as the gateway to economic security and opportunity- particularly for girls and women. World figures in literacy relate a sorry tale. Of the 130 million 6-11 year-old children not in school - a majority - 60 percent are girls. These economic efficiency arguments add to the strong equity arguments for increasing female schooling, and through this, women's economic opportunities and social status, in areas where girls have traditionally been disadvantaged in access to education. Achieving gender equality in education is included among the Millennium Development Goals and many developing country governments now officially recognize this goal as a priority. (Glick Peter, February 2006, pp-4)

Women and girls receive far less education than men; due both to social norms and prevailing discrimination. India has the largest population of non-school-going working girls. India's constitution guarantees free primary school education for both boys and girls up to age 14. This goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, but primary education in India is not universal. Overall, the literacy rate for women is 39 percent versus 64 percent for men. The rate for women in the four large northern states — Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh — is lower than the national average: it was 25 percent in 1991. Attendance rates from the 1981 census suggest that no more than 1/3 of all girls (and a lower proportion of rural girls) aged 5-14 are attending school. (Carol S. Coonrod, June 1998)

The provisional results of 2011 reveal that there has been an increase in literacy in the country. The literacy rate in the country is 65.38 per cent, 75.85 for males and 54.16 for females. The steady improvement in literacy is apparent from Table no.2

Table No.2 Literacy Rate: 1951- 2011

| CENSUS YEAR | PERSONS | MALES | FEMALES |
|-------------|---------|-------|---------|
| 1951 | 18.33 | 27.16 | 08.86 |
| 1961 | 28.30 | 40.40 | 15.35 |
| 1971 | 34.45 | 45.96 | 21.97 |
| 1981 | 43.57 | 56.38 | 29.76 |
| 1991 | 52.21 | 64.13 | 39.29 |
| 2001 | 65.38 | 75.85 | 54.16 |
| 2011 | 74.04 | 82.10 | 65.50 |

Source: Provisional Population Totals, Census of India- 2011

2011 Census data shows that in some states, for e.g. Bihar, female literacy has actually worsened over the last decade. The overall gender gap between male and female literacy rates fell from 24.85% in 1991 to 21.68% in 2001. In 1991, Rajasthan's female literacy rate stood at only 20%, implying that 1 in 5 women in Rajasthan couldn't read.

PROFESSIONAL INEQUALITY: Amartya Sen also pointed out gender discrimination through the way of professional incompetence. In terms of employment as well as promotion in work and occupation, women often face greater handicap than men. (Sen Amartya, Nov. 09, 2001, pp,1)

The employment situation in India, as revealed by the study of available data, suggests the presence of discrimination against women at all levels. Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPRs) are lower for women than for men, the disparity being particularly high in urban areas. In Mumbai, LFPR for women was 10.7%, as against 53.7% for men in 1991 (Deshpande and Deshpande 1992). This disparity is a source of some concern, for high labour participation rates for women have been shown to raise nutrition levels for their children, lower mortality rates and raise sex ratios by combating traditional male biases (Agnihotri 1997).

“In terms of skill development, women are impeded by their lack of mobility, low literacy levels and prejudiced attitudes toward women. When women negotiate with banks and government officials, they are often ostracized by other men and women in their community. Government and bank officials have preconceived ideas of what women are capable of, and stereotypes of what is considered women’s work.” “There is a popular notion among many employers who feel that the men have a greater responsibility in supporting the family than the women and therefore have a greater right to the job.” (Berta Esteve-Volart, January 2004, pp- 1).

HEALTH: Girls and women in India below the age of 30 have higher death rates from illness than men in the same age group. The poor health status of women in India is a major cause of India’s female deficient sex ratio--927 females for 1000 males in 1991. According to the report, women in India experience more episodes of illness than men and are less likely to receive medical treatment before the illness is well advanced. Communicable diseases, maternal and perinatal conditions, and malnutrition account for 68% of death or disabilities among Indian girls and women. (Mudur Ganapati, 29 June 1996) Gender and health issues abound with evidence of the disadvantaged status of women relative to men. India is one of the few countries where women and men have nearly the same life expectancy at birth; despite the natural female advantage in this regard (Chatterjee 1990; Desai 1994; World Bank 1996).

Mortality Inequality is the term used to describe the higher rates of death among women and girls compared to men and boys. India has one of the highest female mortality rates in the world, with a sex ratio of 0.97.

Higher rates of disease and mortality among women and girls are probably the result of a failure to give young girls and women medical care, food and social services, compared to that given to boys and men. The southern state of Kerala has a ratio of 1.04. The northern states have extremely low sex ratios: Uttar Pradesh has 0.89 and Punjab’s is 0.87. (**Gender Bias and Mortality, UC Atlas of Global Inequality**, May 16 2006). Although there are wide disparities in female morbidity and mortality among different Indian states and between rural and urban areas, the worst affected are the so-called Northern belt states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. (Mudur Ganapati, 1996)

Anaemia is widespread among Indian women and affects between 50% and 90% of pregnant women. The neglect of the 28-year-old National Nutritional Anaemia Prophylaxis Programme is “essentially a serious breach of national responsibility, cutting the very roots of basic human rights to life, and good physical and mental health. (Kochupillai N, 1998).

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION: UN Convention on the elimination of all sorts of discrimination against women Part-1, Article 3 says that the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 19-May-2006) But millions of women throughout the world live in conditions of abject deprivation of, and attacks against, their fundamental human rights for no other reason than that they are women. Violence against women is a violation of human rights that cannot be justified by any political, religious, or cultural claim. A global culture of discrimination against women allows violence to occur daily and with impunity.

SOLUTION FOR GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Various movements, programmes are being carried out by the Government, voluntary organizations and by lot of social activities for women’s development and against the gender discrimination. To solve the gender discrimination problem the E 4 SD factor would be very useful. They E 4 SD factors are

1. Education

Education develops the skills, imparts knowledge, changes the attitude and improves the self confidence. It provides employment opportunity and increases income. Hence educating women is the prime factor to combat gender discriminate

and for the upliftment of women. Not only the female, the society must be educated to give equal right for female.

2. Employment

Employment gives the income and improves the economic position of the women. Employed women are given importance by the family members. Employment gives the economic independence for the women.

3. Economic Independence

In India, mostly, women in the young age – depends her father, in the middle age- she depends on her husband and in the older age – depends on her son. Woman always depends on somebody for her livelihoods hence, independent in economical aspects are imperative for women's development. Economic independence will free the women from the slavery position and boost the self confidence. Economic independence of women also helps in the national economic development.

4. Empowerment

Empowering women with the help of laws, education and employment will make the society to accept the women as an equal gender like male. Female also has all the potential and empowering women will help to use her full capability and mitigate the economic dependency of women.

5. Self-confidence

Due to prolonged suppression, Indian women, an especially uneducated and unemployed woman hasn't had the self-confidence. Women need self confidence to fight against all the atrocities against her and to live self esteemed life. Hence, boosting the morale and self confidence of the women, is the key to eliminate the inferior complex of her.

6. Decision Making

Even in the family as well as in the society the decision making power of women is denied. Mostly males make the importance decision in the family and in the society. This makes women as voice less and destroys herself confidence and she feels less important in the family as well as in the society. So, to end gender discrimination women must empower with decision making power.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- i. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- ii. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil
- iii. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- iv. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women

- v. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- vi. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- vii. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- viii. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations (National Policy for the Empowerment of Women - 2001 – India)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Discrimination strikes at the very heart of being human. It is treating someone differently simply because of who they are or what they believe. We all have the right to be treated equally, regardless of our race, ethnicity, nationality, class, caste, religion, belief, sex, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health or other status. Yet all too often we hear heart-breaking stories of people who suffer cruelty simply for belonging to a “different” group from those in power. A nation or society, without the participation of women cannot achieve development. If we eliminate gender discrimination, women will deliver all the potentials, skills, knowledge to develop the family, the nation and the whole world.

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