

Women empowerment and development

Dr. Shamshir Singh, Dr. Ranjit Kaur

Assistant Professor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, India.

Assistant Professor, Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa, India.

Abstract

One of the most significant economic development of 21st Century was the entry of women into paid jobs. The growing participation of women in the job sector was a major trend in all most all the industrialised nations in the 21st century and that trend is proceeding at a rapid rate even in the developing countries of the world. About four decades back women particularly the housewives were likely to be in the home pursuing domestic responsibilities of upbringing the family and taking care of husband and children. The demographic changes such as low birth rates, rising number of divorce cases, delay in childbearing as well as other developments such as women's rising educational status, changes in social attitudes and growing demands of women in job sector are changing the environment at the working place. The time has come that the male dominated society of our country should start realising the potential of women fully so that she too can make her valuable contributions to the society and nation as a whole starts progressing towards the path of social, political, economic and national development and it is only then we can envision the goal of achieving an egalitarians society.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, women infanticide and male dominated society

Introduction

In a country like India, the rising costs have put serious constraints on ability of single person to earn enough and support family thus making it necessary for women to get job and support her husband in running the household. The job sector and the institutions have failed to keep pace with changing trends of the labour market. The women in spite of their entry into the job sector have to carry out the main responsibilities of running household errands. The women working for long hours in multinational companies have to confront the phenomenon of double day. There is a growing trend of gender discrimination at the working place. If a women feels that she will loose her job if she does not put with sexual harassment or discrimination and at the working place if she needs that job badly for her family support she will even put up with this discrimination or harassment. Gender discrimination refers to any situation where a person is denied an opportunity or misjudged solely on the basis of their sex. Gender discrimination is any unequal treatment based on gender. Gender discrimination refers to a situation where a person shows a prejudice towards another that would not occur had they been the opposite sex. Gender equality means that there is no discrimination on grounds of a person's sex in the allocation of resources or benefits, or in the access to services. The right of equality is a fundamental one. However, the institutional forces aligned against it are equally powerful and exert control and shape people's mind-sets.

Various factors such as class caste, community, religion, combine to produce men and women with stereotyped mind set making them accept gender inequality as something given without the need for questioning, preventing existence of a gender equal society. The realization of a truly affluent society is dependent on the establishment of a social framework that allows individuals to choose various lifestyles regardless of

their gender, and without such restricted roles which assume that upbringing of child and the are exclusively women's duties, while men are the main livelihood earners who support the nation. In India, as far as laws and legislations are concerned, women's participation remains insufficient, and women still have few opportunities to realize their full potential.

The traditional view of men's participation in household work and child upbringing as unmanly and the full responsibility of performing daily chores in a household to the raising of the family is placed on the shoulders of the Indian women which testify to the fact that we are still lagging behind as compared to other countries in terms of gender equality. Women still lag far behind in terms of equal pay for equal work, and are not given due representation in the political and economic set up of the country. Government must take major initiatives to address the problem of domestic violence which if goes unchecked can shake the social foundations of a country. Gender equality is a task in progress – not something that has been achieved anywhere on this planet.

Review of related literature

Kalyani Menon Sen and A. K. Shiva kumar (2001) ^[5] found that girls in India are discriminated against in several ways – fewer months of breastfeeding, lack of nutritional diet, lack of proper medical treatment if they become sick or suffer from any disease and poor parental attention. With the result, girls are likely to suffer from disease and infections, leading to poor health and consequently a shorter life duration. It is this continuous neglect, humiliation and life long suffering that is the main killer of girls – less visible and dramatic, but as unequivocally lethal as female foeticide and infanticide which is hard to ignore.

Uzma (2004) ^[7] found out that self-identity is created through the interaction between society, parents and environment. It is a dual process -what people think about you and what do you think about society and you self. Parents attitude towards their children help in formulation of their views regarding themselves and the society. Parents usually consider their daughters as financial burden for the family. They are provided with limited education and confined to the boundaries of their house as compared to the boys who are considered to be the main helping hands of the parents in their old age and the soul bread earner for the family. Because of this gender discrimination starting right from the birth of the daughter in the household, the suffering of the girl child starts and it continues throughout her life even after her marriage and she cannot protest and if she shoes some kind of protest she is suppressed.

This is the first step of suppression that she has to face if she goes against the wishes of her family. According to the researcher even the educated females cannot escape from this kind of suppression. She has to face the double jeopardy phenomenon of performing her duties at the job as well as her routine household duties. Another finding of her research was that the income of the women is not considered as the main financial source for the family, but as supplementary to the income of their males.

Berta Esteve Volart (2004) ^[2] described that gender discrimination against women in the market place reduces the available talent in an economy, which has negative economic impact. Gender discrimination can take various forms. In India's conservative and male dominated society it is still not considered good that women should step out from the boundaries of her house and enter into the job sector as it is deeply set into the minds of the men that the main role of women is child rearing and upbringing of the family. These stereotype practices may have profound negative economic consequences because they do not allow society to take advantage of the potential inherent in women.

Anna Maria Lind (2006) ^[1] stated that India's population still leads traditional lives in rural areas. Religious laws and traditions still govern 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 male child is deeply rooted in the minds of the male dominated society in India. As a result of gender discrimination the girl child has to suffer for her whole life.

Julie Mullin (2008) ^[6] indicated that the developing world is full of poverty stricken families who see their daughters as an economic predicament. This orthodox attitude has resulted in the widespread abortion of baby girls in South America Africa and Asia. In many communities, particularly in India it's a regular practice to abort the girl foetus within womb so that women can try to get pregnant again with a boy as soon as possible. As a result, men and women ratio is highly skewed in some parts of our country. Indian society is conservative with a strong preference for male child. Female infanticide, selective abortion, poor health care facilities and tendency to keep the girls confined to the four walls of the house are brutal consequences of male preference patter. The last census in 2001 showed a sex ratio of 933 women per 1000 men. In industrialised countries, the sex ratio amounts to 1050 women

per 1000 men. Therefore in India, the phenomenon of skewed sex ratio can only be attributed to the practice of girl infanticide. In fact, Indian society is very patriarchal and has a strong preference for men over women.

Legislation framework for women

Women have equality of status under the country's Constitution. However, there are many loopholes under different laws. During the 25 years of the women's movement the government has amended several laws that affect women, including laws related to domestic violence dowry and rape. International conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have been ratified by India. It has set up fast track court in some states and the judiciary has issued a series of progressive judgements in favour of women.

Article 14 of Indian Constitution says that the state shall not deny to any person equality before or equal protection of the law, Article 15 says that no women can be discriminated against on the ground of sex, Article 15 (3) emphasis that the state shall make special provisions for women and children and Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment by the state. Article 39(a) emphasises that the citizens men and women equally, have the right to livelihood, in Article 39(d) it says that the state should secure equal pay for equal work for both men and women and in Article 34 it provides that the state shall make provision for securing just and humane work and for maternity relief.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments of Indian Constitution in 1993 are the milestone in the history of India, which provides lot of powers for the local bodies. It opens the doors for decentralisation, empowers the poor people as well as women. Governments should work together with employers' and workers' organizations and women's associations to prevent sex discrimination in the workplace. Awareness should be brought among women about their rights through information on legislative provisions regarding gender equality and equal opportunities.

Can gender discrimination be solved?

Creating awareness among women

To solve the gender discrimination problem emphasis should be put on the need for awareness-raising through education and training. Women need to be informed of their rights as well as the legal remedies available to them in case those rights are violated. Free and universal primary education is a right stipulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and more recent initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals. School curricula should address human rights issues and fight stereotypes. More must also be done in terms of job training, the promotion of research and the use of new technologies to ensure that women have the transferable skills required to be competitive in an increasingly globalized labour market.

Creating employment opportunities for women

There is an explicit need to reduce the burden of informal work on women to allow them to enter the employment sector. As such, strategies should aim to improve women's access to employment opportunities, resources and social security programmes. Crucially, any initiative must include both men

and women and must address the concerns of women in both the informal and the private sectors. It was underscored that the introduction of legislation is not enough to induce real change. Legislation must be accompanied by effective implementation measures.

Participation in social and political spheres of life.

Women must participate socially and politically. Their self-esteem depends on it. This is the way to build genuine equal opportunity, not just on paper but in achievable programmes that promote innovative and positive positions and that enable women to take part in “Equal opportunities” in all spheres of the life.

Women empowerment

Women empowerment through the means of laws, education and by providing entry into the job sector will make the society to accept the women as an equal gender like males. With the help of employment women will be able to realise her full capabilities and will be able to stand on her own feet and gain full economic freedom and will positively contribute to the upbringing of her family and to the progress and development of nation.

Conclusion

It is difficult for a country to proceed on the path of national and economic development without the participation of the women in all spheres of life whether it is social, political or economic. Until and unless the roots of gender discrimination are not cut-off from the social fabric of the country it is very difficult to achieve progress and development.

References

1. Anna Maria Lind. Struggle and Development: Approaching gender bias in Practical International Development Work, Orebro, Orebro University, 2006.
2. Berta Esteve, Volast. Gender discrimination and Growth: Theory and Evidence from India, London, London School of Economics and Political Sciences, 2004.
3. Channar ZA, Abbassi Zareen, Ujan I. A. Pak. Gender discrimination in workforce and its impact on employees. J commerce and social science, 2011, 5(1).
4. Indian audit and account department. Gender sensitisation and related concepts, 2012.
5. Kalyani, Menon Sen, Kumar Shiva AK. Women in India: How Free? How Equal? New Delhi: United Nation Development Programme, 2001.
6. Mullin Julie. Gender Discrimination – Why is it still so bad and what can you do about it? www.childerninneed.org, 2008.
7. Uzma S. Literacy and Women in Identity, Proceedings of International conference on Social Sciences: Endangered and Engendered, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, 2004, 84-96.