

Elimination of Discrimination against Women – A Shared Value of Social Work: Some Preliminary Observations

Vikram Jograna

Assistant Professor, Anand Law College, Anand, Gujarat, India

Email: vsjograna2111@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Women are suffering from many social issues such as gender inequality, discrimination, domestic violence, unequal payment, sexual harassment, exploitation, trafficking and so on. Women are suffering from discrimination in all contexts such as social, economic, political, educational etc. There is a need for women-centered services to remove discrimination. Women's issues need to be taken seriously because discrimination affects them in many facets of life. Despite controlling a little percentage of resources, women perform the majority of the work in the globe. The fact that women have independent needs unrelated to their roles in the family or as carers for children, the elderly, and the disabled is one of the most important concerns facing social workers. Social workers may respond in ways that are repressive or detrimental by unconsciously adopting specific opinions about what women ought to be doing in accordance with conventional gender roles. This paper is based on the secondary data and review of existing data regarding the practices of social work for elimination of discrimination against women, its aim will be to find out social work practices related to women for their empowerment and development.

Keywords: Discrimination, Social Work, Elimination, Value, Observations

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, discrimination against women is acknowledged as a kind of inequality and a problem. It interferes with women's ability to freely and fully engage in society, which has detrimental psychological effects. Though there are variations by nation, religion, community, or ethnicity, women still make up half of the world's population, and a sizable fraction of them continue to face direct or indirect discrimination at various stages of their lives (Pokharel, 2008).

Women's discrimination is frequently perceived at the family level as well as in society also. Owing to sociocultural norms and patriarchal worldview, parents prioritise their sons above all else. Owing to cultural customs, girls acquire domestic skills at a very young age and start doing household chores including cooking, sewing, laundry, cleaning, and child care. They also start earning extra money from cottage crafts to support their families. In rural communities, there is a strong conviction that a son should go to school since he would have to support his ageing parents, unlike a daughter who marries and works for another family (Sultana, & Zulkefli, 2012).

About 25% of Indians believe that women face "a lot of discrimination" in their nation. Furthermore, 16% of Indian women said that, in the 12 months prior to the 2019–2020 study, they had directly experienced discrimination on the basis of their gender. Furthermore, 75% of individuals believe that violence against women is a major issue in Indian society. About half of Indian adults (51%) believe that teaching boys to "respect all women" is more important than teaching girls to "behave appropriately" in order to promote women's safety. However, over a quarter of Indians (26%) hold the opposite view, essentially holding women accountable for acts of violence against them (Pew Research Centre, 2022).

Indians in various places perceive the level of prejudice against women in very diverse ways. Respondents from the South are often more inclined than those from the Hindi Belt to believe that discrimination against women is pervasive in India today. For instance, over a third of adults in the Southern states of Telangana and Tamil Nadu (44 percent and 39 percent, respectively) believe that there is a lot of prejudice against women. In comparison, just 6% of respondents in the Hindi Belt states of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh believe this to be the truth. According to earlier research from Pew Research Centre, South Indians are also more likely than Indians in the Hindi Belt to believe that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes face a great deal of prejudice. (Pew Research Centre, 2022).

Gender equality and women's empowerment are now at the centre of all international agendas. The fight to achieve women's freedom and eradicate gender inequity has been ongoing for a long time. Furthermore, achieving sustainable development is thought to need the empowerment of women (UNFPA, 2021).

According to the UN Population Division, India makes up 17.7% of the world's population and 2.4% of the world's total land area (Kumar, 2021). The World Bank estimates that women make up 48% of India's entire population (Trading Economics, 2022). India's population has grown over the years, with the exception of 1911–1921, according to Hussain (2014). The urban population is growing as well; between 1950 and 2015, it increased from 17.1% to 29.2% (Gulankar, 2019). According to census estimates from 2011, India's overall literacy rate was 74.04 percent, with 82.14 percent of men and 65.46% of women literate (India Book, 2020). In 2001, there were 933 girls for every thousand males in India; by 2011, that number had risen to 940. There has been a noticeable decrease in the overall fertility rate from 2.7 in 2005–2006 (Arora, 2021).

Major Causes of Discrimination against Women in India

Discrimination against women in society is unquestionably a serious problem, and a variety of societal, cultural, and psychological factors are fundamental to its evolution.

- ❖ **Poverty:** One of the main causes of gender inequality is poverty. The World Bank estimates that women make up about 70% of the world's impoverished population. Poverty perpetuates a vicious cycle by limiting access to economic, healthcare, and educational possibilities (CRY, 2024).
- ❖ **Dowry Death:** In India, a serious issue has been the rise in the number of dowry deaths of women at their marital residence in recent years. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau released the number of recently married brides who were murdered in

order to pay the dowry. Even if the Indian Penal Code's Section 498A addresses the offender of marital cruelty, the number of cases is rising or they are not being reported in a timely manner. The act of Dowry Prohibition now treats the taking and giving of dowries as illegal. It has been found, therefore, that the majority of states do not have dowry prohibition officers or have mandated the keeping of records of gifts and receipts.

- ❖ **Illiteracy:** 960 million adults worldwide lack access to basic education, with women making up the majority, despite significant efforts made by nations to address this issue. Gender discrimination has been a result of females' educational backwardness. The differences in the literacy rates of men and women start to show around 2001. Between 1981 and 2001, the percentage of boys who were literate rose from 56% to over 76%. The equivalent rise in female literacy from 30% to 54%. Overall, the reduction in the gender gap is less striking; it peaked in 1981 at 26.6% and was 21.7% in 2001. Male literacy rates varied far less between states than female literacy rates. State-level rates of female literacy range from 35% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala. Below 50% of women are literate in states like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, and Rajasthan (Shuani, n. d.).
- ❖ **Child Marriage:** Another concerning facet of gender inequality that disproportionately affects girls is child marriage. According to UNICEF estimates, 12 million girls get married before turning 18 each year. These actions impede their personal growth and promote gender inequality for future generations. One of the main factors contributing to gender disparity that further exacerbates the issue is a lack of education. According to UNESCO, 132 million girls worldwide do not attend school, giving them less opportunity than boys to learn. The right to education is essential for enabling girls to question social conventions, pursue occupations, and make educated decisions (CRY, 2024).
- ❖ **Social Attitude:** Attitude disparities still plague our rural masses, despite the fact that numerous social activists and reformers carried out their struggle against all social barriers to restore honour and dignity to women. Women in our society are still victims of social atrocities, superstition, exploitation, and illiteracy despite significant advancements in technology and society. One possible explanation for the gender gap could be the societal stigma that women are housekeepers and should be kept within the four walls of the home. For the sake of the family's reputation, they shouldn't speak out about their wealth. Men are given a lot of weight in patriarchal societies (Shuani, n. d.).

Social Work Practices to Eliminate the Discrimination against Women

Feminist practice in social work is informed by a feminist perspective that offers insight into topics including power dynamics, gender inequality, and violence. Social workers can challenge systems and policies that harm women by implementing feminist practice, which is women-centered (Alston, 2018). Although social work originated in part from a charitable care model, the adoption of a feminist practice framework by many social workers has likely been constrained as a result of the profession's recognition and high regard. There seems to be an

inherent conflict between social workers' desire to be seen as professionals and their mistrust of the acceptance of feminism as a professionally acceptable framework for social work practice, despite the fact that women predominate both the profession and the clients who use social work services (Dahle, 2012). In addition, social workers might provide professional skill training through unofficial education programmes. By providing them with useful skills, the chance to build their self-confidence, and the necessary bravery to defy ingrained social norms, these programmes can empower women. Through programmes that aim to remove barriers that affect them, social workers can also empower women. Women can participate in political processes and decide locally by doing this (Kalpana, & Pradeep, 2020). The goal of social work as a field is to advance social justice and gender equity by concentrating on gender issues (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). According to Reisch (2005), social workers analyse how race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation manifest in connection to dominance and subordination as part of their analysis of oppression. Germain and Gitterman (2013), however, advise social workers to consider their identities and potential prejudices. Germain and Gitterman also recommended self-evaluation as a necessary step before assisting clients and influencing groups and societies about gender issues. Consequently, social work plays two roles in relation to gender issues: internal as a profession grounded in knowledge and values, and external as a capable multidisciplinary organisation working to improve fairness and human welfare by raising awareness and values among the stakeholders. Social workers' roles in relation to gender issues in India necessitate a sensitive value system, adherence to social justice and gender equity, and, most importantly, cultural competency when discussing gender with all relevant parties. Social worker works to promote gender awareness through participatory gender analysis techniques, like creating daily schedules for work for both sexes. It carries out further gender awareness initiatives like film screenings, public hearings, workshops, and cultural exchanges, all of which can aid in dispelling the numerous patriarchal stereotypes that encourage sexual discrimination. Gender training is a useful tool for social workers to illustrate the advantages of having both men and women in public life. When the majority of women participate, social work has a huge potential to alleviate gender disparity, especially for women. Research has indicated that a greater number of women participate in agricultural pursuits (Kalpana, & Pradeep, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Discrimination against females is a widespread problem. Bias against women is experienced on the basis of gender. In India, prejudice against women is more pervasive in both rural and urban areas. Regional, religious, and cultural norms and traditions all have an impact on discrimination. Both biological and societal factors are given distinct roles. In terms of physical roles, women are meant to take care of the home, kids, family, and relatives, while males are meant to make a living via suffering and hard work. Our ladies became weaker and deprived of necessities as a result of all these ideas. Human rights are equal for both. In a society where men rule, discrimination against women occurs. Because of this, the majority of women are unable to comprehend their own freedom and rights. Therefore, discrimination not only hinders women's futures but also the development of the nation (Kumar, 2020). Social work and gender variables interact on a number of levels, including how we provide services to women - whether

through women-only or mainstream programmes (Dahle 2012; Weeks 2003). As a result of the "feminization of poverty" (Merino & Lara, 2016), the intersection of gender with other factors like class, education, and culture (Baldwin, 2010), and the predominance of women in single-parent households, the client base for social work reflects the gendered nature of the profession. Additionally, social work frequently involves women working with women to address significant stresses that are made worse by gender-blind social policies that increase women's powerlessness. The effects of gender on the personal, professional, and political environments in which social workers operate are significant.

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