



“Gender Equality in Indian Society”

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Introduction

Guru Nanak once said ‘How can you curse a woman who gave births to Kings’. The term ‘Gender Equality’ narrates the equal valuing of the different roles assumed by men and women. The theme strives to overcome stereotype barriers and prejudices so both men and women are capable of equally reaping benefits and contributing towards social, political, cultural and economic developments within society.

Gender Inequality, may be defined as discrimination against women based on their sex. Women are traditionally considered by the society as weaker sex. She has been accorded a subordinate position to men. She is exploited, degraded, violated and discriminated both in our homes and in outside world. This type of discrimination is more common in Indian society.

Although men and women are dissimilar physically, but it is the economic, political, social and legal interpretation of such differences that ultimately lead to create inequality among them. In social inequality, men and women typically have different responsibilities and roles in their daily lives as well as work. It is anticipated that men seem to do much riskier and heavier work that is generally located away from their home. Work done by men seems to have much higher status as compared with women who have the major responsibility for child-care, elderly-care, preparing and managing food for their families.

Gender equality signifies a society in which men and women enjoy the similar opportunities, outcomes, obligations and rights in every sphere of life. Equality between women and men exist only when both sexes are capable of sharing mutually in the distribution of influence and power; have equal opportunities for monetary freedom through formation of businesses or work; enjoy equal and easy access to education and the prospects to develop own personal goals.



Inequality for Women

Women mostly have unequal access to health services and education, face glass ceiling at work place. Social customs that force or encourage girls into early child bearing and teenage marriages have dangerous and direct consequences for their health. There are much high levels of brutality and violence against women almost in all nations around the world. This could be among their families where it is treated a normal custom. Violence, in the span of armed conflict, is used to humiliate the rivals and also to undermine resistance and morale.

Economic inequality is directly related to the monetary and financial conditions of women. More than seventy percent of poor in the world are women, while the number of females living in poverty has significantly and disproportionately increased as compared with men. Women also have unequal access to major economic resources like credit, capital, land and labor. Restricted opportunities for career advancement and employment are available for women. These limitations restrict the capabilities of women to improve their monetary and economic scenario.

Women are not represented appropriately at all levels of governments' decision making in community, but specifically at national and regional levels. The legal system in most of the countries discriminates particularly against women in the fields of inheritance, family law, land ownership, property, criminal law and citizenship. The prosecution of cases, in most of the countries, involving violence against women is difficult and complex.

The discrimination specifically against girls and women- including economic discrimination, gender-based violence, harmful conventional practices and reproductive health inequities-remains the most persistent and pervasive form of inequality. Moreover, girls and women bear extra hardship during, as well as, after conflict and different humanitarian emergencies.

Gender Equality- An Established Human Right

“Women make up roughly half the human population but are relatively marginalized compared with their male counterparts.”

The gender equality has been accepted and acknowledged as human rights' principles since the adoption of charter of United Nations in 1945. Most of the international agreements such as 'the Millennium Development Goals (2000)' and 'the World Conference on Human Rights



(1993) have highlighted and stressed the grave need for nations to take appropriate actions against such discriminatory practices.

Accomplishing the goal of gender equality requires both men and women to work jointly in sorting and hunting for the solutions, in the particular ways that encourage and support mutual trust and respect. The programs to ensure gender equality should address all types of violence against women, including trafficking in girls and women, promoting positive role of women in peace building and conflict scenarios. It should also be ensured that the issues of gender equality are effectively incorporated into infrastructure and governance activities.

Gender equality is the foremost and primary human right. Women are equally entitled to live in freedom as well as dignity from fear and from want. Empowering women is an effective tool for reducing poverty and advancing development. Empowered women are in a better position for contributing towards productivity and health of entire families as well as communities. They can also support in improving prospects specifically for the future generation. (Kramer, 2004)

Despite many agreements at international level affirming the human rights of women and ensuring the cause of gender equality, women are yet to be more likely, as compared with men, to be malnourished, poor and illiterate. They generally have a low level of access then men to property ownership, medical care, employment, credit and training. Their possibilities for being politically active are less than men. Moreover they are far more exposed to the domestic violence.

Empowering Women for Maintaining Gender Equality

The ability of women for controlling their fertility is entirely fundamental to the empowerment and equality of women. When a woman is healthy she is more productive. When women's productive rights- including the basic right to plan birth timing along with spacing and to make critical decisions related to the coercion and reproduction- are protected and promoted, she has autonomy to participate equally in the society. A vital aspect of supporting the idea of gender equality is based on empowering women, with a prime focus on redressing and identifying power imbalances as well as giving more autonomy to organize their lives. Women empowerment is in fact critical not only to sustainable development but to the understanding of human rights for everyone.



Society and Gender Equality

A prosperous and flourishing society means that women and men have equal opportunities for realizing their human rights. Men and women contribute mutually towards fulfilling the requirements of societal and cultural development. The societal and cultural development is directly linked with the political, national and economic development. The men and women must benefit equally in a society from the outcomes of that development. (Kramer, 2004)

However inequality severely restricts socio-economic development, specifically in the developing countries, where most of the women are the major food producers, primary teachers, gathers fuel and water, laborers and providers of health care in the informal economy. Sustainable development in a society is reliant on the equal contributions made by men and women. As such ensuring equal participation by women in the progress of their societies requires two major elements; equal ability to contribute as well as equal opportunity to perform such activities. The status of women in the major areas of society including education, health, decision making and access to resources must be improved. Premeditated efforts should be made to ensure that particularly women have a justifiable and equitable role towards shaping the societal growth.

“Despite many improvements in the status of women there are still many inequalities:

- Two thirds of people in the world who cannot read are female.
- Nearly seventy percent of the world's poorest people are female.
- Women represent a growing proportion of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- In only 16 countries in the world is women's representation in national parliaments above 25 percent.
- Women's contributions to the global economy are growing rapidly but their labor remains undervalued and undercounted in national accounts.
- An estimated one-quarter to one half of all women have suffered physical abuse.”

Gender Issues being Addressed in Organizations

Human Resource Management represents effective and implementable solutions for the issues evolving from the inequality between men and women. The adoption of a practical HRM model in organizations present equal opportunities, specifically for personnel policy as the adoption of an HRM theme which signifies developing and valuing people in pursuit of goals



and which stresses the individual's role and the significance of involvement, provide opportunities for arguments about assessing all people.

The diversity in valuing people enables the promotion of gender equality to be associated with the accomplishment of business goals. The hypothesis that the rise of Human Resource Management is valuable for women, and also for gender equality requires immediate attention and action. This attention is critically needed as significant inequalities exist particularly in organizations reflecting on the progress of women into non-conventional areas of work.

Although significant progress has been made to ensure gender equality, still a lot of work is to be done. The HRM practices in an organization provide workable solutions. Particularly in the public sectors of most of the nations, due to its mission and anti discriminatory management along with provision of public services still remains a major issue. The debate is how to create circumstances in which men and women can accomplish their potential. (Wilson, 2003)

At the level of organizations, practices and policies relating to gender management are generally in the sphere of human resource management (HRM). It is pertinent to mention that HRM is viewed as strategic in the organizations; it specifically involves entire managerial personnel including general managers; it treats people as the most significant sole asset of the organization; it is purely proactive in its direct relationship with people; and it eagerly seeks to enhance the performance of companies, the societal well being and employees' needs. A consistent concept of HRM literature is the creation and development of accountability to line managers for the purpose of managing human resource. (Wilson, 2003)

“Responsibility for the effective implementation of the Gender equality policy rests with the Head of each Department of office, supported by the senior management team.”

Senior line management, in particular, is described as possessing “the locus of responsibility” for human resource matters. The line managers' role is no longer limited to organizing and monitoring the delivery of services, but is developing in relation with HRM. It involves accomplishing the HRM policy objectives of commitment, flexibility, quality and eventually the effectiveness of subordinates. In the modern age, HRM managers are subject to, and more involved in novel practices in direct communications, selection, appraisal, target setting, training and development and motivation. (Kramer, 2004)



Development of responsibilities to HRM managers is a primary element in the recent concepts, related directly to diversity and equality management. Instead of concentrating on under-represented groups like females, managing diversity is primarily based on the theme that people should be rather valued as individuals for general reasons related to the interests of business as well as for social and moral reasons. Development of responsibility to HRM managers is emphasized when the issue is considered of who is actually responsible for implementing effectively the process of valuing entire individuals. This is a grave matter of concern for entire employees, particularly managers instead of being viewed as an issue related with only human resource practitioners.

In pursuit of such organizations that provide equality and fairness, which specifically ensures that both men and women fulfill their utmost potential, there are many issues surfacing from development of accountability to HRM managers, the first concerns HRM manager competence while managing people effectively. Insufficient training along with considerable strains of work has been mainly highlighted as characteristics restricting the level to which devolvement of human resource management is possible. The deficiency of managerial competence and capabilities rather than sexism or racism, could be the major cause of manager's incapability to manage, diverse and fair group of people.

Another issue is whether or not to evaluate HRM managers on their effectiveness in assuring gender equality. Measurement could be a primary element with appropriate results and performance goals for accomplishing results. Moreover, equal opportunities goals for HRM managers could also be counter-productive and as such they should specifically be encouraged to set goals for themselves, focusing primarily on their managerial capability.

Challenges Faced by Human Resource Managers

To ensure equal and non-discriminatory treatment of both men and women is still a significant challenge confronted by the HRM managers in the organizations. In the area of managing diversity and HRM, there is much emphasis on delegated responsibility with line managers assuming the major role. Delegation and devolvement has some substantial resonance with the present pragmatic deliberations of the organizations where optimal resources are inadequate and central overheads are particularly subject to scrutiny. (Wilson, 2003)



However, devolving responsibility for the purpose of gender management raises some significant questions. The first is whether this symbolizes a significant opportunity to embed into cultures of organizations, managerial thinking, behavior and values of equality and fairness while addressing the gender issues which are the major aspiration for most of the organizations. Second is whether instead the removal of a supporter of equality, and the stress on line managers being primarily responsible for gender equality in the pursuit of their HRM duties, reveals the circumstances for abdication on behalf of individual managers.

Devolvement of gender management to HRM managers could present a significant opportunity for locating direct responsibility within the remit of most adequate people. Managers could confront many challenges while ensuring gender equality. It includes increasing activities of HRM, conflicting priorities, their deficiencies and lack of accountability regarding equality.

Examples of Current Applications

Behavioral and attitudinal commitment are applied to support and increase job performance and to check the rate of turnover, justifying entire investments made in highly trained, highly flexible and high quality employees. A wide range of personnel policies is also applied by the HRM managers to confront the challenges of gender inequality. These policies are directly linked with the employee involvement like communication, job design and leadership style.

Attention to ensure gender equality reflects a pure research-based cognizance that organization's commitment towards resolving this issue is influenced by work and job experience rather than by gender or by personal features. For example, high level of gender equality exists in those organizations where job provides ample scope for self expression and responsibility. Socialization and selection are also viewed as significant aspects while applying the solutions to ensure gender equality. An important example of current application is the organization's commitment towards gender equality measured by certain inputs such as visible hours and quality of achievement. The willingness and ability to work annualized hours is yet another significant example of current application.



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