Causes and Consequences of Gender Gap in Workplace

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The concept of gender discrimination has been a significant social issue, persisting both before and after India's independence. Indian society has long grappled with gender bias, which manifests in various sectors, including workplaces and education. This paper explores gender discrimination from multiple perspectives: its historical presence, its impact in Haryana, workplace discrimination, its effects on employees, discrimination in the education sector, gender bias in the tech industry, discrimination faced by men, Indian workplace laws, and the role of HR in supporting women.

Concept of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination is not confined to India; it is a global issue. Men and women worldwide are actively fighting against such discrimination (UNDP, 2021). Discrimination refers to the unreasonable bias based on class, region, age, culture, height, color, race, gender, caste, etc. (Kabeer, 2005). This issue is prevalent in various fields, including banking, medicine, and education. Employees face discrimination in multiple forms—geographical, economic, legal, political, cultural, and social (ILO, 2020). Gender discrimination specifically refers to unfair treatment based on gender characteristics. In our society, women are often considered weaker than men (Nussbaum, 2000). Although Indian law advocates for gender equality, women have historically faced more discrimination than men (Goel, 2014). However, men too face discrimination, particularly in gendered roles and expectations (Connell, 2005).

One pertinent question arises: is gender equality merely a constitutional provision, or does it reflect reality? Workplace discrimination based on culture, age, disability, religion, and economic status remains a concern (Deshpande, 2011). The roots of gender discrimination can be traced back to conservative societal thinking. Traditionally, the birth of a boy was celebrated, while the birth of a girl was considered a burden (Sen, 1999). Boys had greater access to nutritious food and education, whereas girls were often confined to domestic spaces. This historical disparity laid the foundation for gender discrimination. Other contributing factors include poverty, lack of education, low self-confidence, and ignorance of rights (Dreze & Sen, 2013).

Women have long been victims of gender discrimination, but it is essential to acknowledge that men also face biases (Flood, 2007). However, women experience discrimination both at home and in the workplace (Gupta, 2019). Over time, societal attitudes have evolved, allowing women greater professional participation. Despite their skills and competencies, gender bias persists, extending from homes to workplaces (Patel, 2010). Women today manage both household responsibilities and careers, yet they continue to face professional discrimination. One example is the increased workload on male employees when female colleagues take maternity leave, often without a corresponding salary adjustment (ILO, 2021).

Although legal provisions grant men and women equal rights—including education, free expression, and employment opportunities—gender disparities persist in practice (NCW, 2022). India remains a male-dominated society, but gender discrimination is not solely a result of male attitudes. Women's lack of awareness about their rights and self-confidence also contributes to this issue (Basu, 1992). Additionally, conservative societal norms continue to reinforce gender roles. Men are often perceived as mentally and physically stronger, while women are seen as emotional and dependent on male figures (Chakraborty, 2020). Women seek independence, yet societal structures often hinder true empowerment.

Gender bias in employment extends to various sectors, including banking, industry, healthcare, and education (Agarwal, 1994). Women aspiring for government jobs frequently face unique challenges, especially if relocation is required. For instance, a woman may need to choose between her career and her family if her husband refuses to move for her job, whereas men typically do not face the same dilemma (Desai, 2009). Many working women endure the emotional strain of being away from their families. Traditionally, women's primary focus has been their families, but today, they strive to balance both professional and domestic responsibilities (Sen & Grown, 1987).

During recruitment, training, and performance evaluations, women often encounter gender bias (Das, 2012). Indian society, dominated by male perspectives, frequently underestimates women's empowerment (Chaudhuri, 2017). The conservative mindset has imposed limitations on male and female roles based on gender norms. Gender stereotyping—associating particular traits, behaviors, and abilities with men and women—further reinforces discrimination (Ridgeway, 2011). It is widely believed that men are assertive, decisive, and strong, whereas women are emotional, confused, and physically weak (Yusuf, 2008). Many men struggle to accept that women are equally capable in professional environments (Srivastava, 2016).

Family influences also contribute to gender discrimination. Parents often reinforce stereotypes through children's toys, clothing, education, and mobility restrictions (UNICEF, 2020). These biases perpetuate gender disparities across generations. Discrimination against women is evident in the limited opportunities and resources available to them compared to men (Sen, 2001). Gender stereotyping creates barriers to equal opportunities and professional growth, highlighting the deep-seated societal beliefs that sustain discrimination (Kimmel, 2018).

Factors Leading to Gender Discrimination at the Workplace

In India, gender discrimination is a pervasive issue affecting both men and women across different regions (Kabeer, 2005). However, women are more significantly impacted than men. Despite demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and abilities, women often do not receive the opportunities and recognition they deserve (Deshpande, 2011). Gender discrimination is present across various sectors, including banking, insurance, services, and education. While both men and women strive to develop their careers, they face inequality in the workplace. The primary reasons for such inequality include a lack of knowledge about fundamental rights, low self-confidence, and the absence of morale to express views (Ridgeway, 2011). Gender inequalities in India are multidimensional, and the following factors contribute to discrimination in the education sector and other professional fields.

Discrimination During Recruitment, Selection, and Training

Both male and female faculty members face unfair treatment during recruitment, selection, and training due to favoritism or lack of necessary skills, contributing to gender discrimination (Brouns, 2006). Employees experience inequality in aspects such as teaching methods, recruitment policies, student grading, classroom management, educational program design, and discipline delegation, which collectively lead to discrimination in educational institutions.

Discrimination by Co-workers

Both male and female employees often encounter rude behavior from colleagues of the opposite gender at the workplace. In some cases, co-workers take the opportunity to insult others when they do not perform assigned tasks satisfactorily (Acker, 2006). Unhealthy jokes and gender-based comments—even from superiors—create an uncomfortable working environment, further perpetuating gender discrimination.

Discrimination Due to Maternity and Pregnancy at Work

During interviews, favoritism may influence the selection of candidates. Pregnant female candidates often face rejection because employers anticipate that they will require maternity leave, leading to temporary work disruptions (Baker, 2010). Male employees may also express dissatisfaction when female colleagues take maternity leave, as the additional workload falls on them. Consequently, some female employees choose not to disclose their pregnancy during recruitment and selection.

Job Discrimination

Both male and female employees may be assigned easier tasks based on management's preference. If a male faculty member takes leave for training or personal reasons, or if female employees return from maternity leave, management may disproportionately increase their workload (Williams, 2017). Additionally, men face discrimination when additional responsibilities fall on them during a female colleague's maternity leave.

Geographic Discrimination

India's cultural and regional diversity plays a role in workplace discrimination. Many individuals relocate to different states, particularly for government jobs, which are highly sought after in India (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). However, employees may experience discrimination at the workplace based on their language, cultural background, or regional affiliation. Geographic discrimination is a prevalent issue where individuals are judged based on their speech patterns, traditions, or intellectual differences.

Economic Inequality

Economic factors contribute significantly to gender discrimination. In today's era, employment is a necessity for both men and women. Women stepping out of their homes for work often face societal scrutiny and additional responsibilities related to childcare (Sen, 1999). Economic discrimination includes factors such as job availability, proximity to home, salary packages, preference for government jobs, and other workplace benefits. These disparities impact both men and women, but women often experience more limitations in terms of job opportunities and salary negotiations.

Legal and Political Discrimination

The Indian Constitution grants equal rights to both men and women. However, certain laws are perceived as being more favorable to women, sometimes leading to discrimination against men (Menon, 2009). Political interference also plays a role in gender discrimination. Candidates with political backing may secure jobs despite lacking the necessary knowledge and skills, while others work under political pressure for fear of job insecurity. In such cases, individuals are hesitant to voice concerns about discrimination or injustice in the workplace.

Cultural Discrimination

Cultural discrimination in the workplace arises due to differences in culture, language, and race. Employees who belong to the same cultural or linguistic group often find it easier to express their views, while those who migrate from one state to another for job opportunities may face discrimination. This can occur whether they relocate alone or with their families. Cultural discrimination manifests in various forms, including biases based on physical characteristics, skin color, dress, language, customs, and traditions (Kabeer, 2016).

Social Discrimination

Social discrimination occurs when individuals or groups at the workplace discriminate against others based on caste, disability, sexual orientation, diversity, career choices, or age. Such biases create an exclusionary work environment, preventing equal opportunities and career advancement (Das & Dhanaraj, 2020).

Causes and Consequences of the Gender Gap in the Workplace

The gender gap in the workplace has profound economic, business, and social consequences. Economically, underrepresentation of women in leadership and high-paying roles reduces overall productivity and GDP growth (World Economic Forum, 2022). Wage disparities often leave women financially insecure and hinder career progression. In business settings, a lack of gender diversity limits innovation, increases employee turnover, and fosters environments where discrimination and harassment persist (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). Socially, gender disparities reinforce traditional stereotypes and contribute to higher poverty rates among women. Additionally, with fewer women in leadership and policy-making positions, workplace gender issues often remain unaddressed (OECD, 2021). Organizations that neglect gender

equality face reputational risks, legal consequences, and lower employee morale. Addressing gender gaps through equal pay policies, inclusive hiring practices, and workplace flexibility is essential for fostering a fair and productive work environment.

Conclusion

Gender inequality continues to persist in society, affecting both men and women. Historically, differences in children's upbringing, access to education, and social expectations have contributed to systemic discrimination. While gender discrimination was once primarily confined to households, it has now extended into workplaces as well. Women often struggle with a lack of family support, financial responsibilities, and maintaining work-life balance. Additionally, they face discrimination in various forms, including workplace jokes, inappropriate comments, body shaming, maternity bias, and unequal economic and legal treatment (UN Women, 2023).

Gender discrimination also impacts psychological well-being, workplace harmony, career progression, and organizational reputation. Furthermore, it can lead to inefficient hiring practices, where unqualified candidates receive career opportunities over deserving ones. Both men and women, whether intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to workplace discrimination, thereby hindering their own professional and personal growth. Therefore, promoting gender equality is essential for building an inclusive, progressive, and equitable work environment.

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