THE CONCEPT OF GENDER SENSITIZATION – AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Medha Gupte
Principal & Associate Professor
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s Hazarimal College of Arts &Science
Mumbai, India
Email: guptemj@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

Gender sensitization is an important requirement for the development of an individual. It simply refers to modification of behavior by raising awareness of concerns of gender equality. Women in India are generality a neglected lot. The Indian Constitution, however, that is in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles principle of gender equality is clearly laid down. The Articles 14, 15 and 16(a) of the Constitution guarantees equality before law and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, sex, descent, place of birth and residence. The problem of gender inequality is very complex in India, as it is spread across different fields and classes. For the social, political and equal development of our country women have to be developed and this requires sensitization. This requires the individuals to be more open-minded and rational, taking steps to ensure women’s safety, training at the grassroot level in schools/colleges to remove gender bias and generation of better knowledge. Women in any country play an important role in the nation’s development process and it follows that with gender sensitization what is important is Women Empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Gender inequality, Gender budgeting

INTRODUCTION

Gender sensitization is an important requirement for the normal development of an individual. The need for sensitivity has been felt and realized since times immemorial, in almost all kinds of human existence across the world. Being vital from the view point of development, the topic has been drawing a lot of attention of late. In this Paper therefore an attempt has been made to look into the concept of gender sensitization, touch on the status of Indian women, examine the need for sensitization particularly in a country like India, discuss the laws existing in the country and analyze the challenges and future of gender sensitization in India.

Looking at the historical background, it is clear that in independent India both men and women have been given equal rights under the Indian Constitution. However, despite making progress and occupying some vital positions, Indian women are still a suppressed with the problem being more acute in the rural areas. This deters the gender sensitization process in India. This could be because of factors such as overpopulation, the craving for a male child, treatment of women as secondary citizens, high female illiteracy rate, poverty and absence of adequate health and medical facilities.

With the advancement and enrolment of Indian traditional society changes take place in gender roles and expectations. One finds that over the years focus has shifted across various milestones and the country has moved ahead from the abolition of customs like Sati and child marriage to reforming rigid inheritance laws to demand for equal wages and political involvement of women. Discrimination
against women still continues. Therefore gender sensitization awareness and workshops are necessary. Even though the status of the Indian woman has increased we are still short of realization of full equality. More effective measures are required. After all empowerment of women is an important tool for advancing development and reducing poverty.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explain the Concept of Gender Sensitization;
2. To discuss the Concept of Women empowerment;
3. To examine the need for Gender Sensitization;
4. To touch on the Challenges faced in India and look into the future prospects.

CONCEPT OF GENDER SENSITIZATION

Gender sensitization can simply be defined as modification of behavior by raising awareness of concerns of gender equality. This is possible through sensitization, campaigns, workshops, conferences, programs etc. The behavior will be one which is sensitive to gender justice and issues of gender equality. It is linked to gender empowerment.

The initiation towards gender sensitization is to ensure adoption of gender budgeting. Gender budgeting refers to preparing budgets or rather still analyzing budgets from the gender perspective. It is considered as a powerful tool for achieving gender mainstreaming. This will guarantee that the fruits of development reach the fairer sex. What is essential is commitment from the State to ensure the participation of women in governance at all levels.

In fact gender sensitization training can be considered as a practical tool for analyzing gender relations and providing adequate information regarding major factors that are related for altering and maintaining the structure of gender relations. It is concerned with developing skills and having the capacity to translate such awareness into specific tools that can be used in practice.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

When one looks at the history of the status of Indian women one can classify it into four periods:

1. Ancient Indian period, where Indian women enjoyed equal rights as men. They even participated in political affairs and were given equal educational opportunities;
2. Medieval India which witnessed the discrimination against women. Several socially unacceptable systems like Sati, Child marriage, Purdah System prevailed. Women had no political rights and were treated as slaves by men;
3. The British Period which saw some improvement in the status of women;
4. Present India which is marked by participation of women in all walks of life. However, even today dowry deaths, honor killings, rapes, acid attacks, eve teasing are common.

In the Indian Constitution that is in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles principle of gender equality is clearly laid down. The Articles 14, 15 and 16(a) of the Constitution guarantees equality before law and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, sex, descent, place of birth and residence.

The following are the important laws which have been passed in India for the upliftment of women:

1. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 which provides equal rights to women to obtain divorce and also maintenance in certain cases;
2. Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 – adoption of a child by a woman as her son or daughter;
3. Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956;
4. This Act entitles a woman to act as a natural guardian of her minor children;
5. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956;
6. Here a woman has equal rights when it comes to inheriting family property;
7. The Hindu Women Right to Property Act of 1973
8. According to this Act the daughter, the widow and the mother can inherit the property of the deceased. It follows that women can accordingly hold property absolutely with full right to sell, mortgage and dispose of as she so desires;
9. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961
10. According to this Act, taking or demanding a Dowry is an offence punishable by imprisonment or by fines;
11. Equal Remuneration Act of 1976

The Act prohibits discrimination between male and female workers.

In addition the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Women and Child Development Brought out the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001). It has the following objectives:

1. Creation of a conducive environment, which through positive economic and social policies would enable women to realize their potential;
2. Equality in enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women which would be on par with men in all spheres;
3. Equal access to health care, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment and equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security etc;
4. Strengthening of legal system which would help in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women;
5. Bringing change in societal attitudes and community practices by through both active participation and involvement of men and women;
6. Mainstreaming of gender perspective in the development process;
7. To eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child;
8. Building and strengthening of partnerships with civil society particularly related to women’s organizations.

NEED FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION

In reality a man is different from a woman biologically, but it is the societal difference which is important. It is an accepted fact that in our society man is the savior who will work and protect his family. The woman on the other hand will raise children, cook food and work at home.

Gender sensitization is necessary because we have assured that equality of freedom is given to every strata of society which can best be organized through education, workshops, campaigns etc.

Women in India still have to face the wrath of inequality and this can mainly be attributed to lack of gender sensitivity among males. The socio-economic environment plays an important role in the mindset of individuals. The urgency therefore arises, for building a family atmosphere where all members of the family enjoy an equal status and are equally respected irrespective of their gender.

As citizens of the biggest democracy we cannot be blind to our duties and responsibilities to the society. One shudders to think back on the heinous crime committed in New Delhi on 16th December
2012. India prides itself in having the youngest population and it is they that can play an important part. It is crucial that the initial seeds are sown in the classroom where the youth work and interact in an atmosphere of mutual respect and responsibility.

The Nibhaya Rape Case highlights the medieval Indian mindset and the existence of gender bias in both rural and urban areas. The education curriculum being as it is restricted to academic subjects only, it follows that it is the responsibility of the parents and the family as a whole to teach moral values to the children.

A point worth noting is that we as a whole have failed to encourage thought and debate on gender sensitization. What we must remember is that both men and women have equal values. It is necessary to ensure that our legacy to the younger generation gives us an equal opportunity.

The following generations have to realize that all are equal. For the social, political and equal development of our country women have to be developed and this requires sensitization. This demands

1. Individuals being more open-minded and rational in their mindset and activities;
2. Shattering of all orthodox beliefs;
3. Taking steps to ensure women’s safety;
4. Training and awareness generating measures in schools/colleges, workplaces and in society to remove gender based prejudices and thereby change stereo type working culture about their attitude towards in leadership positions;
5. Generation of better knowledge of all levels of society including commercial activities, role play etc.

The problem of gender inequality is very complex in India, as it is spread across different fields and classes. One can say that gender gaps are widespread in terms of access to basic rights, access to and control of resources in economic opportunities and political sector. This impedes economic development. Inequality can be seen at various fields such as workplace; Violence – dowry deaths, rape etc. poor health care; lack of education and economic constraints.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women in any country play an important role in the nation’s development process. To quote late Prime Minister of Independent India; Shri Jawaharlal Nehru “You can tell the condition of the nation by looking at the status of its women”. It follows that along with gender sensitization what is important is Women Empowerment. This could be attributed to the following factors:

One, for years Indian women have been undergoing both mental and physical torture. Empowering and educating women will make them economically independent and also help in them guiding their family in particular and nation in general;

Two, treated as the subjugated class adequate health facilities have not been provided to them. Empowerment will make them stronger and this would augur well for the future;

Three, educating women will go a long in the economic development of the nation, as it would improve the quality of human life. This would definitely help in reducing infant mortality, promoting the education of the girl child and providing better guidance to their own children.

Four, Indian social structure is a male dominated patriarchal system. When it comes to financial constraints the male child is given priority in pursuing higher studies, while females are forced to drop out even though they may be better in studies. Empowering women would help to change this lopsided picture
CHALLENGES FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION IN INDIA

Looking at the historical background, it is clear that in independent India both men and women have been given equal rights under the Indian Constitution. However, despite making progress and occupying some vital positions, Indian women are still a suppressed with the problem being more acute in the rural areas. This deters the gender sensitization process in India.

Several factors could be held responsible for this. They include

Demography

India is an overpopulated country where child marriage still exists. This increases the fertility span which is detrimental to both the mother and child. Providing family planning could be considered as a cost effective means of improving the lives of women and children particularly for a developing country.

The craving for a male child

A son is always looked upon as a source of security. Apart from increasing the birth rate it has led to sexual imbalance, where the number of males outnumbers the females.

Treatment of women as secondary citizens

As mentioned earlier women are entitled to equal rights and treating them as secondary citizens will only hamper the progress of the nation.

High illiteracy rate among females

Females have a much lower literacy rate as compared to males. As per the data of the 2011 census, while about 75% of the men are literate, the rate is just 54% among females. Even among the women themselves, the divide between the men and women is obvious. While 73.9% of the urban women are literate the literacy ratio among the rural women is much lower at 46.1%

This is largely because of negative attitude of the parents towards the girl child and her education. The general feeling is that girls leave the house after marriage and therefore spending on their education would be waste of money and time;

Further what is worse is that the Illiterate women are ignorant about their rights and steps initiated by the governments for their welfare;

Poverty

One of the major hurdles impending India’s path of development is Poverty. It results in financial constraints which results in greater attention being paid to the male child and neglect of the female child;

Absence of adequate health and medical facilities

Women face a number of problems which adversely affects the economy output. Gender is a major social determinant of health and high degree of gender inequality negatively impacts health of the woman.

FUTURE OF GENDER SENSITIZATION IN INDIA

With the advancement and enrolment of Indian traditional society changes take place in gender roles and expectations. One finds that over the years focus has shifted across various milestones and the country has moved ahead from the abolition of customs like Sati and child marriage to reforming rigid inheritance laws to demand for equal wages and political involvement of women.

Even today one finds some form of discrimination and the progressive families are no exception. This could be in the form of education, choosing a career or a life partner. Girls are expected to help in
household chores and the younger male members could possibly have same expectations from their wives after marriage.

The need of the hour is for maintaining gender just society at home and in everyday life. Compulsory gender sensitization workshops for civic authorities including police and judiciary are necessary. In fact the behavioral change should be initiated at the grassroot levels in schools so as to inculcate a sense of equality and respect in children.

As societies progress there is a rise in the crimes against women in our country. There is urgent need for gender sensitive education and upbringing. Raising of our children without discrimination would be a big step forward.

It is no doubt true that the status of women has improved over the years however, the mainstream Indian society falls short of realization of full equality of women. Efforts are being made to strengthen the existing legislation.

One can conclude by saying that the past harassment should be forgotten and one should concentrate on the present. The point to be remembered is gender equality is a fundamental right and every woman is entitled to live in dignity without fear. In fact empowering women is an important tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowerment of women contributes to the health and productivity of the families.

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