4. DISCRIMINATION IN THE UNIVERSITY IN INDIA

Special Reference to the Bangalore University Women Employees in Karnataka

INTRODUCTION

Despite changes to the status of women in India, the strong patriarchal traditions continue to shape the way that women take their place in Indian society. There are more opportunities for women in India today, inclusive of political, financial and working opportunities, but it is difficult not to notice that India is still a male dominated society. Since the passage of the Government of India Act (Misra, 1966) the social status and education of women in India has expanded. In India, literacy of women is increasing rapidly with the number of women entering higher education reaching 40.04% in 2002-03 from 10.9% in 1951 (Singh, 2008). However, in spite of the opportunities thrown open to her in various fields along with some labour-saving gadgets in the house, Indian women still seek ways to consolidate a professional identity as an independent and honorable human being. This chapter will discuss the current workplace issues facing professional Indian women, inclusive of women working in academia. The main issues and what can be learnt from these will be discussed in the light of research conducted at Bangalore University and how implicit discrimination against women provides a powerful obstacle in women’s aspiration for leadership and career progress.

WOMEN IN INDIA

The concept of equality has exercised a powerful emotional appeal in the struggle of women to free them from age-old oppression. During the last few decades, industrialization, urbanization, increasing level of education, awareness of rights, wider influence of media and westernization has changed the status and position of women. However, as many professional women from around the world have experienced, the present sky rocketing prices resulting in economic tension have aroused professional women’s might in easing the financial and economic constraints of her life. For this, she has to maintain an equilibrium and balance between home and career. However, as desired as more income may be for professional women, a persistent conflict is the disjuncture between her mothering role and her professional
role (Maheshwari, 2013). In addition, to role conflict, the role of the workplace in providing support needs to be expanded to ease women’s conflicting roles. The role of mentoring is a viable way for women to gain access to workplace support and to help women ease some of their social, cultural and economic burdens.

Today, the status of Indian women has changed. The number of educated women including the number of working women is increasing. Out of the total 397 million workers in India, 123.9 million are women. Of these, roughly 106 million women work in rural areas and the remaining 18 million work in urban areas. Ninety six per cent of the women workers are in the unorganized sector. Overall, the female work participation rate has increased from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.7 per cent in 2001. In the rural areas, it has increased from 23.1 per cent to 31 per cent and in the urban areas from 8.3 per cent to 11.6 per cent (Deshmane, 2012). Although more women seek work, a vast majority work in poorly paid jobs in the informal sector. These jobs are without any job security or social security. This is because of the increasing unemployment and under employment among the male members of the family and the increasing cost of living as a result of the neo liberal economic policies.

At present, women are in a position to compete with men in all walks of life. Even fields traditionally occupied by men, such as engineering, have shown a growth in the number of females graduating from these fields, especially in the last 15 years as India experiences rapid development (Parikh & Sukhatme, 2004). However, in India, the “practices of respectable femininity and discourses of the Indian family” (Radhakrishnan, 2009 p.295) continue to shape cultural norms. For example, Gupta and Sharma (2002) found that women academic scientists in India work with patrifocul beliefs which shape family and workplace life.

Working women struggle with their cultural stereotyping which essentially means that they are not thought of workers equal to men. The constant discrimination creates a powerful influence on women that leads to feelings of inferiority within the workplace. Research shows the high level of mental fatigue, stress related illness and high degree of job dissatisfaction among working women. For example, a study by Patel., et al., (2005) showed the high rates of chronic fatigue amongst Indian women. The study concluded that “psychosocial factors indicative of poor mental health and gender disadvantage” (p.1190) are evident in the high instances of fatigue. Hence, women face problems like job strain, role conflict, sexual harassment, inadequate household help, financial dependence and other occupational hazards, gender discrimination. The feeling of guilt and neglect in turn affects their job productivity and efficiency and earns them a poor reputation as workers.

Women workers in universities are not exempt from the issues that face other professional women. The universities of the world stipulated three in-dissociable principles which every university should stand for namely a) Right to pursue knowledge for its own sake. b) Tolerance of divergent opinion and c). Freedom from political interference. Despite the social and economic progress in India and the changes to encourage more women to participate in the workforce, the
experiences of female academics shows that much more needs to be done to ensure that women have a right to pursue knowledge, experience the tolerance of diversity and experience a political freedom. My own experience and informal conversations with fellow female academics told me that the three principles of higher education, were not evident in women’s experiences and this led me to conduct research specifically about academic women. Due to challenges in education and heavy demands made by society on working women, many female academics experience stress that can affect the health and wellbeing of working women in academia.

Therefore, I felt a dire need to undertake a study investigating and exploring the implicit discrimination in the workplace with reference to Bangalore University women employees in Karnataka. The study focused on problems that adversely affect women working in universities, and problems that create obstacles for women experiencing the rights provided by universities to all academics, such as the right to pursue knowledge, tolerance of diversity, inclusive of gender, and freedom from political interference. The aim is to help created an increased awareness about these problems and also for seeking promising solutions, such as increasing access to mentoring, in order to wipe away women’s problems and to help the ‘struggling lady’ take a cool sigh and march ahead in her dual life.

THE STUDY

Discrimination in today’s workplace is largely implicit, making it ambiguous and often very difficult to prove (Rooth, 2007, Pratto& Shih, 2000). Harassment is any improper and unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person. Harassment may take the form of words, gestures or actions which tend to annoy, alarm, abuse, demean, intimidate, belittle, humiliate or embarrass another or which create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment (Einarsen, 2000).

This study investigated the major problems faced by two groups of women as they aim to break traditional rules and restrictions on their employment and how they deal with such problems. Through a series of interviews, women explained how they handle their problems, how they are being accepted by the society, how they stand up to society’s restrictions, and the effects of paid employment on their lives. The women interviewed have been divided into two categories category one including teaching staff and category two includes nonteaching staff in Bangalore University. The socio-economic characteristics that differ between the two categories include; age, educational level, salary, marital status, status of the head of the household, number of family members.

Previous research and the author’s own experiences showed that women often chose their career out of economic necessity rather than a real choice. In their working life, it is married women who experience greater difficulty in managing the dual responsibility of work and family. The stresses of managing both suggests that it is
these married women who hold positions, but have little chance of upward mobility. As a result of this limited mobility, a situation exists where there is a mismatch between women’s education level and the position she occupies. The dual stress of family and work, in addition to the limited chance of promotion and mobility results in limited job satisfaction of married women. A word of caution here, the interviews are not to distinguish between married and unmarried women, rather to show how the expectations of family, work and discrimination against women, create difficulties especially for married women, inclusive of female academics.

**Profile of Bangalore University**

Bangalore University is a public university located in Bangalore, Karnataka State, India. The university is one of the oldest in India, dating back to 1886. The University was opened as the Central College, Bangalore in 1886, by the British Government to award University degrees. It was renamed as the Bangalore University from Central College, Bangalore by the UGC, India on July 10, 1964 by the government under the then State of Mysore to consolidate institutions of higher education in the city of Bangalore. The Central College, Bangalore (established in 1886) and the University Visvesvaraya College of Engineering (UVCE) (established in 1912) (the two original institutions in Bangalore) were subsumed into this university. With the promulgation of the Karnataka State Universities Ordinance of 1975, which aimed at bringing uniformity to all universities in the state, the university lost its federal character and became a state-affiliated university. In 1973, the University moved to the Jnana Bharathi Campus located on 1,100 acres (4.5 km²) of land.

The Bangalore University gave birth to universities like Visvesvaraya Technological University, Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences. The university’s Institute of Aerospace Medicine (IAM) has been designated by ISRO to train astronauts for the Indian space program. Bangalore University has been awarded the Sir M Visvesvaraya chair from ISRO to perform research in space science. Because the University produces the largest number of PhDs in India, it has acquired a good reputation among foreign universities. Consequently, the university hosts a growing number of foreign students.

In 2001, the university received Five Star Status. Sir C.V.Raman, Nobel Laureate physicist, was associated with the University and announced his Nobel winning work at the University premises at Central College, Bangalore in 1927. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930. Professor Leonid Hurwicz who served Bangalore University as a Professor in Economics won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2007. Professor Hurwicz served as a Professor of Economics at Bangalore University from 1965-1968. The university has impressive facilities, including a bio-park so students can acquire knowledge and experience in land management for social forestry, aqua culture and ornithology. The university also has an impressive library and its own publishing unit. Every year around 45 inter-collegiate sports competitions are held.
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for men and women section. There are welfare programmes initiated by the institutes like subsidized transport facility for the university staff and students, subsidized canteen facility, free medical aid and reimbursement of medical expenses including on hospitalization, loan facilities from GPF. The University stands guarantee for house building loans sanctioned by the HDFC and also all other nationalized banks and co-operative societies.

Table 1. Number of teaching staff working in Bangalore University

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Teaching Staff</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>627</td>
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*Source: 45th Annual Report Bangalore University*

Table 2. Number of non-teaching staff working in Bangalore University

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Non-teaching staff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1245</td>
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*Source: 45th Annual Report Bangalore University*

The objectives of the study were to present a social and economic profile of working women in Bangalore University. By studying the factors that influence how women work in the university the study will identify the major problems faced by both married and unmarried women and how they assess their employment inclusive of job rewards and the extent of their social and economic freedom. Rather than focussing on the research design, the focus of this paper is to raise issues about the participants’ responses, discuss why these issues are prevalent and how they may influence other women seeking to work in academia in India. The aim is to raise awareness of some of the current problems that female academics are experiencing in order to help better prepare new academics for the reality of working within an Indian University.

The proposed research aims to describe the issues pertaining to working women of an organized sector called Bangalore University. It aims at understanding the nature and magnitude of problems both at work place and home including working conditions, job satisfaction and role conflict. The researcher has carried out the study by randomly selecting 100 respondents from all teaching staff and non-teaching staff.
working at Bangalore University. The study comprises a cross section of working women of Bangalore University including different levels starting with Professor to the lowest rung- Class-IV women employees. All women employees working in various Departments and Administrative Offices of Bangalore University constitute the case site for this study. Though the study presents an outlook of the working women Bangalore University in Bangalore, the researcher will also draw on her previous field work and research.

Problems faced by Working Women at the Workplace

The following issues have emerged from the study. They are not ranked in order of importance but they represent a cross section of responses from the study. The aim is to discuss these issues in the light of the findings and analyse why these issues are relevant for women academics.

**Relationship with colleagues:** As discussed, the capacity of a working woman is always suspected because of the expectation that women should also put time and energy into looking after and caring for her family. Therefore, for working women, including female academics, the assumption is that the women is not fully focussed on her work. As noted by Radhakrishnan (2009), respectability and femininity are still not fully associated with the working women. So that from the onset, many women have to prove their right to work with other colleagues and that their working life is ‘respectable’. The implicit discrimination faced by married women who want and need to work is that those in authority are doubtful whether she would be able to handle male subordinates, make independent decisions, cope with crisis and manage her duties. Even though many women have proven their efficiency through their work achievement, those in a position of authority are likely to think twice before promoting her. Even if she is given a chance, there is always a remark that she has been given the position because she is a woman. However, it should be noted that more recent studies (Kaur, Singh, & Dutta 2012), suggest that married women are able to handle stress better than other workers, suggesting a married women can cope with multiple demands, but the authors suggest that this comes at the expense of their own freedom and self-care. India also has a division amongst the classes, so the research showed that women from the upper class cadres preferred to work with men. Even though the qualifications of their female colleagues were equal to their males’ colleagues, they preferred males. Therefore, for female academics from the lower classes, they not only face discrimination from male colleagues and male leaders, they also have to contend with class discrimination from other female colleagues.

**Not much choice:** Another notable problem for the woman worker is that she does not get jobs in the fields of her interest. This is especially evident for married women who experience a reduction of freedom once they are married (Kaur, Singh & Dutta 2012) and they may be less likely to pursue their own interests. The women have to accept the work they get. What this lack of choice indicates is the need to further empower Indian female academics. Kabeer (1999) has stated that a key
element of empowerment is having the ability to choose and make choices. This is where female Indian academics are lacking, for the most part; she does not have enough power to choose her work according to her interests. Kabeer suggests three conditions that are needed to make this choice more accessible, a) having access to resources, b) being able to take action and c) being able to achieve the desired outcomes. As noted in Datta and Gaitley (2012),

The preconditions faced by women in India are significant and reflect system-wide gender discrimination. Often women’s access to resources, particularly jobs in the formal economy, is limited due to cultural conditions that subordinate the role of women. (p.571)

Women in the study also noted part of the difficulty of choosing work is also due to factors outside her control. For example, women experience difficulty getting to their workplace. The present transport system is far from satisfactory; generally women have to suffer the worst due to misconduct or even teasing by co-passengers. Sometimes they have to wait hours at the bus stop to board a bus. Even when the bus comes, due to it being over-crowded she is not able to catch it. Train travel is not much better. Therefore, the three conditions that make empowerment possible are severely restricted due to poor infrastructure and poor resources. Similar to the lack of transport which makes getting to her job difficult, lack of basic resources also affect the way women can work. The lack of basic facilities such as toilets, rest rooms and dining spaces at the workplace cause a lot of physical discomfort and mental stress for women. In some cases, this has created serious health issues such as urinary tract and other diseases, particularly among pregnant women.

**Sexual harassment**: Sexual harassment has been defined in the Supreme Court guidelines (Vishakha vs State of Rajasthan, August 1997), sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as: physical contact, a demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, Showing pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, for example, leering, telling dirty jokes, making sexual remarks about a person’s body, and so forth (Patel & Mondal, 2013). Sexual harassment is another serious problem faced by working women. Whether in the organized or unorganized sector, whether illiterate, low paid workers or highly educated and highly paid executives, a large number of working women face sexual harassment at the workplace. Violence against Indian women is well documented (Rastogi, & Therly, 2006, Sharma, & Gupta 2013). However, the fight against sexual harassment has been an ongoing issue for Indian women since the 1980s. Patel & Mondal, (2013), state, “Sexual harassment at the workplace has been one of the central concerns of the women’s movement in India since the 80s” (n.p). It may seem trivial in the face of violence against women however; the two acts against women are linked. Patel and Mondal, (2013) suggest,
But this trivialisation did not deter the women’s rights activists… *Baailancho Saad* (‘Women’s Voice’) in Goa mobilised public opinion against the chief minister, who allegedly harassed his secretary, through demonstrations, rallies and sit-ins till the minister was forced to resign. In 1990, the same organisation filed a public interest litigation to bring amendments in the antiquated rape law that defined rape in the narrowest sense. (Patel, 2013, n.p)

Despite ongoing efforts to raise awareness about sexual harassment it remains an issue for university women. Recommendations by the National Commission for Women (NCW) have particularly focussed on the safety of women in and around college and university campuses. The Commission was set up in response to sexual violence against female students. Institutions were given strict guidelines to prevent sexual harassment and rape on campuses. The women in the study identified sexual harassment as an issue for their employment, and considering it is usually under reported (Patel & Mondal, 2013, Patel, 2013), it remains a persistent threat to any civilised society and to the progress of women.

**Women Face Wage and Training Discrimination:** A study by Barnabas, Anbarasu, and Clifford, (2013) demonstrates many of the issues that confront women in the workforce. They state,

> The construction sector has the largest number of unorganised labourers in India next only to agricultural sector. Women form half the workforce and by choice or by design they are not allowed to acquire specific skills that may enable them to become masons. Women join as unskilled workers and remain unskilled till the end of their working life span. (p. 121)

Throughout the economy, women tend to hold lower-level positions than men even when they have sufficient skills to perform higher level jobs. Researchers have estimated that female agricultural laborers were usually paid 40 to 60 per cent of the male wage. Among the 100 respondents, 68 per cent are paid Rs. 5-10 thousand per month, while 26 per cent are in the income range of Rs. 11-15 thousand. Women employees who are drawing more than Rs. 21 thousand per month are few in number that is only 2 per cent fall in this group. Even when women occupy similar positions and have similar educational levels, they earn just 80 per cent of what men do, though this is better than in most developing countries. A recent study (Khanna, 2012) also suggests that the wage differentials are greater for lower earners. She states, “To put it simply, women who are low wage earners face a greater gender gap as compared to women at the higher end of the wage distribution” (p.11).

The public sector hires a greater share of women than does the private sector, but wages in the public sector are less egalitarian despite laws requiring equal pay for equal work. For example, the Equal Remuneration Act states that employees of both genders are doing the same or similar work of the same value is paid equal remuneration in cash and kind. Two other acts are also supposed to protect the rights of women. Maternity Benefits Act means that a woman is entitled to payment during
her maternity leave at the rate at which she was working prior to the leave period and the Factory Act of 1948, Mines Act of 1952, and Plantation Labour Act of 1951 were passed to protect and regulate the wages of women from time to time without any discrimination. Though the constitution of India provides for equal pay for equal work for both men and women, women earn substantially less than their male colleagues doing similar work. However, the evidence of a ‘sticky floor’ amongst Indian professionals is not entirely related to India but is a global phenomenon. Khanna (2012) states, “women who have high levels of education and are at the top end of the distribution are perceived to have high levels of commitment and due to their past investments in education are thought to be stable employees (p.30). However, the issue is that women have to get there in the first instance.

Workplace Support and Mentoring

Developing mentoring programs is an initiative that should be taken seriously by Indian Universities to overcome discriminatory practices and conditions for female academics. The programs are essential to create awareness of obstacles specific for female academics in India. These programs are one way to change employment expectations and conditions in order to create employment and work opportunities for women and to increase the diversity of women in the higher education sector. The problems, evident from a study at Bangalore University, are indicative of the issues facing many women across the higher education sector in India. Many of the problems are associated with social and cultural practices that shape everyday life. These cultural practices are changing however this is a slow process. Formalised programs of mentoring will ensure that while cultural practices are evolving to be more inclusive of working women, women who are currently in workplaces are well served. As Haq (2013) suggests,

Organizations in India need proactive human resource management targeting issues of gender equality, diversity and inclusion policies, supportive leadership and positive mentoring in organizations aimed at removing the systemic, social and attitudinal barriers to help secure a place of gender based respect and trust in organizations earned through their competence, commitment and hard work. (p.3)

Another suggestion that complements mentoring is the provision of workplace ‘facilitators’ (Maheshwari, 2013) who specifically focus on helping women managing both their working and mothering roles. This may be a unique issue for Indian women, therefore a specific focus on this issue would not only help working women but also help to create attitudinal change because the role conflict issue is out in the open and acknowledged. Programs should raise awareness of the “double burden” of the working women. The awareness program would also involve male colleagues who should be encouraged from childhood to share household work with women. Workplaces, inclusive on universities should be encouraged to provide
“women friendly work policies – like flexible job hours and home office – as well as a cooperative home environment and assistance for housework” (Desai, Majumdar, Chakraborty, & Ghosh 2011, pp. 432). In addition, the media could be mobilized on this regard.

Mentoring programs should cover some of the other workplace issues. For example, mentoring programs that offer better training for women in their workplace skills, such as time management and management skills will help women to seek promotion based on performance. There should be a campaign within and outside the civil service arena to eradicate sexist and discriminatory attitude and stereotypical ideas about professional women. Mentoring programs can raise awareness amongst males and females about harassment and how to eradicate it. It is the most important task because removing the harassment of women workers will help to address may other problems as harassment is indicative of the negative attitude and behaviour against women. It also leads to other more violent expressions against women if it is allowed to go unchallenged. Mentoring programs must deal with harassment and provide strategies to women to not only deal with it, but to report it and ensure that they have the right to a tolerant and equitable workplace. It is critical to have clear and effective rules and systems to deal with the issues of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The development of mentoring programs is at the early stages in India. A study by Chhatrapati, Bhardwaj and Singh, (2011) that focussed on mentoring affirmed that women managers, for example are mentored by their parents, superiors or their teachers. She is not learning from other professional women who may have special insight into her conditions. The author concludes that the mentoring climate is still in the making in India. However, while these programs are developing, universities can be leading the way for professional women.

CONCLUSION

Discrimination is still a large problem in society and in the workplace. It can be a difficult issue to curtail because there are many different types of discrimination that can affect people’s behaviour and perceptions. Employees can be discriminated against because of their race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity and even age. Each of these issues has its own sensitivities and problems but stopping discrimination in the workplace requires an across-the-board ban on unequal treatment and vigorous enforcement on behalf of managers and employees. Among the other difficulties for female academics is negative attitude towards them from the community, colleagues and the authority. The society perceives women as soft and unfit for taking challenges. The deeply entrenched ideas about women’s roles, as mothers mean that many working women are viewed negatively. Male colleagues and superiors pass negative comments to them; subordinates do not cooperate. Women academics face some unwanted situations that men usually do not face. Often they have to encounter some aggressive attitude from the people, and academic professionals deal with
Mentoring programs have the capacity to address the very serious workplace and career issues that face female academics working in higher education. Through such programs, issues such as gender discrimination, harassment and unfair practices can be brought to the open and addressed by both male and female academics. These programs can provide the professional and social support for women in the workplace and help to create working conditions that help promote women as valuable workers.

REFERENCES


**AFFILIATION**

Samata B. Deshmane  
Department of Sociology,  
Bangalore University,  
Bangalore-560056.  
India, Karnataka