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Discrimination: An overview

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Abstract

The term 'discrimination' is used by people in their day to day conversation conveniently, but is understood by a few only. Generally, discrimination is interchangeably used along with the terms- stereotypes, prejudice, and segregation, which are closely related to each other, however, are not synonyms for discrimination. Therefore, the present paper attempts to explore the meaning, types and causes of discrimination.

Keywords: Discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice, segregation

Introduction

What is 'Discrimination'?

The meaning of term 'discrimination' can be better explained if distinction between the terms- stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and segregation- that are closely related to each other, is understood. Stereotypes are oversimplified generalisations or beliefs about groups of people, may be based on different socio-economic and/or cultural attributes such as race, gender, caste or almost any characteristic. They may be positive but are often negative. Prejudice implies thoughts, feelings or emotions of someone about the others, based on prejudgement that originates outside the experience. It refers to biased thinking about people. Discrimination consists of actions against an individual or group. When prejudice takes the form of taste in favour (or against) it reflects through the actions of an individual (or group of individuals). As Becker (1957) ^[4] defined considering prejudice a taste, discrimination is indulging that taste. Segregation is a type of discrimination whereby a group of individuals is separated from the other group(s) of individuals, with respect to their access to education, housing, civic facilities, occupations, etc., on the basis of their caste, colour, race or ethnicity, etc., (Gupta 1991, Deshpande 2011) ^[10, 6].

Discrimination against any particular segment of society is a complex issue having economic, social, political, cultural and regional dimensions. The economic discrimination is one dimension, related to the unequal exchange of similar productive attributes of individuals in the market and reflected in the form of unequal access and rewards to employment opportunities. Arrow (1971a) ^[2] defined (economic) discrimination as the valuation in the marketplace of personal characteristics of the worker that are unrelated to worker productivity. It is the situation whereby a segment of the society, that has same productive characteristics as the others, is discriminated with respect to its access to the employment opportunities, wage rate, occupational access, and working conditions, on the basis of its non-productive characteristics such as race, colour, religion, caste or sex etc. (McConnell *et al.* 2009, Deshpande 2011) ^[19, 6]. Alternatively, discrimination is when members of a minority or a group are treated differently or less favourably than members of a majority group with identical productive characteristics.

Types of discrimination

Over time various concepts of discrimination were developed. These concepts correspond to various dimensions of the analysis of the problem of discrimination. However, it should be noted that the list of discrimination types discussed is not exhaustive and that these concepts are not mutually exclusive.

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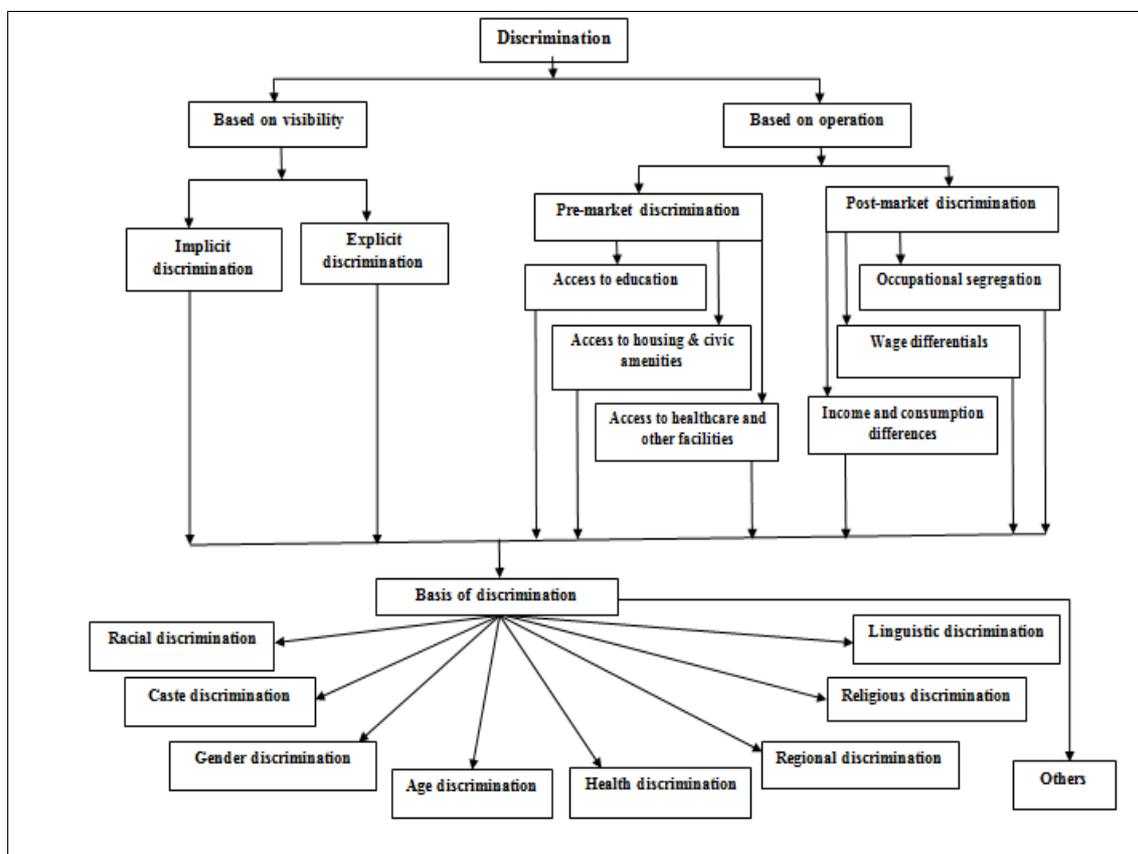
Visualisation of Discrimination: One dimension is related to the visualisation of the practice of discrimination. On this basis, discrimination may be implicit or explicit. It is implicit when a person that is following the discriminatory practices against other individual or group of individual is not able to realize or aware of his/her actions are being discriminatory; it is termed as an implicit or invisible form of discrimination. This discrimination comes from ideas, associations, and preferences from people's subconscious minds (Rooth 2007) [22]. The converse is true in case of explicit or visible discrimination. The sign "Dogs and Indians are not allowed" used by the British in India is the classical example of explicit discrimination. Similarly, "whites only" sign by the employer present explicit discrimination by the employer against the blacks.

Operation of Discrimination: The second way of classification and understanding of discrimination is in the form of operation of discrimination (Bertrand *et al.* 2008, Rooth 2007, Garcia 2010) [5, 22, 9]. On this basis, discrimination may be divided into two parts: premarket discrimination and market or post-market discrimination. The premarket discrimination is also known as the past or indirect discrimination because it occurs before the individual enters the market. This type of discrimination affects a worker via low parent health and education, impoverished neighbourhoods, and unequal schooling systems (Laing 2011) [16]. It is generally considered in terms of human capital discrimination i.e., One group has less access to productivity-enhancing opportunities, such as formal schooling, housing, civic amenities, and health care services. Consequently, discriminated segment remained lacks of basic attributes required to access more rewarding

employment opportunities and hence remained segregated into low income and status occupations (Marshall 1974, McConnell *et al.* 2009) [18, 19].

On the other hand, market discrimination may be understood as a situation whereby participants in the marketplace (e.g., Employers, employees, customers) keep in mind factors such as race, ethnicity, caste, and sex while making decisions for exchanges in various factors and product markets. For instance, the labour market discrimination occurs when an individual or group of individuals is discriminated at the time of hiring and firing or payment of wages, given that they are equally productive and unproductive as the rest, except in term of their race, ethnicity, colour or caste etc. (Becker 1957, Arrow 1971b, Akerlof 1976, McConnell *et al.* 2009) [4, 3, 1, 19]. The market discrimination thus leads to occupational segregations and wage differentials between the groups of individuals discriminated in-favour and against.

Further occupational segregation may be understood in terms of generational occupational immobility. In the case of India, *Manu-Smriti* based caste-occupation affinity perpetuated historically and still prevalent in many low rewarding occupations. The *Dalits*, or using terminology of the Constitution, the scheduled castes and tribes, were traditionally assigned menial, manual labour oriented, low income generating and low status bound occupations only and they kept performing these occupational activities through the generations (Gupta 1991, Thorat *et al.* 2012, Jodhka and Newman 2012) [10, 24, 13]. Workers belonging to the discriminated group were either paid lower wages for equal work or paid equal wages but were required to work for longer hours (Becker 1957, McConnell *et al.* 2009, Deshpande 2011) [4, 19, 6].



Source: Author

Fig 1: Types and basis of Discrimination

Discrimination against an individual or group of individuals may be practiced on the basis of various grounds. It includes race, caste, sex, age, health, region of origin, religion, language etc. to name a few. When individuals are discriminated on account of their racial background, it is termed as racial discrimination. Similarly, caste discrimination is based on the caste attribute of the individual. The participants in the marketplace may prefer to favour their own caste group members over the members from the other caste groups. Gender discrimination occurs when male and female participants, that are equally productive, are not treated equally for making economic exchanges. Any exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing the women's human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field, is termed as gender discrimination.

Age discrimination occurs if a person's age unfairly becomes a factor, in the workplace practices, in the decision making of who receives preference in new job employment, promotion, or other job benefits? This type of discrimination commonly affects aged workers who feel they have been discriminated against in favour of younger ones, even though there have also been reverse situations involving younger workers being displaced by older workers. Sometimes employees may experience discrimination in the workplace on basis of their physical disabilities or health issues or behaviours such as the way of walking, talking, looking, hearing, learning, and communicating. This type of discrimination is known as health (status) discrimination. Discrimination based on the region in which a person lives or was born is defined as regional or geographical discrimination. This type of discrimination is often accompanied by discrimination based on accent, dialect, social or cultural differences (Garcia 2010, Macinko *et al.* 2012) [9, 17].

In the case of religious discrimination, a person or group is treated differently because of their beliefs about a religion. Followers of different religions are treated unequally due to these beliefs, either before the law or in institutional settings, such as employment or housing (Drydakis 2010) [8]. For example, a Hindu employer may discriminate against the non-Hindu employees while hiring or firing the workers. Similarly, a non-Muslim house owner may not rent his property to an individual belonging to the Muslim religion due to the religious biases. Linguistic discrimination is another form of discrimination which is practiced on the basis of an individual's use of language. This may be based on characteristics of the person's speech such as accent, syntax, whether the person uses complex and varied words or not, individual's native language, inability to use one language instead of another etc. Thus, based on spoken language, a person may automatically form opinions about another person's social status, wealth, education or other traits (Schutz and Six 1996; Jaspal 2009; Whitley and Kite 2010) [23, 12, 26]. Discrimination may also be practiced on some other basis such as political and cultural etc.

The economic analysis of discrimination emerged in the quest to overcome the racial discrimination in the United States of America. The same types of analysis were conducted elsewhere to understand the causes and consequences of discrimination. Also, attempts were made to measure the extent of discrimination in the employment process, wages, and cost of discrimination, for individuals as

well as for the economy as a whole. Broadly, these attempts can be defined into two groups: based on the assumption of static equilibrium, which presumes a full employment economy; and the dynamic equilibrium based analysis (Krueger 1963, Welch 1967, Arrow 1971a and 1971b, Phelps 1972a) [15, 25, 2, 3, 21]. Caste in India is one such institution on the basis of which a segment of the society was historically deprived of its access to basic civic amenities and education and was segregated to menial, labour intensive, unclean, low paying, and low-status occupations and it continued to suffer from the same type of discrimination (Kosambi 1944, Gupta 1991, Gupta 2000, Dirks 2003, Michael 2007) [14, 10, 11, 7, 20].

Conclusion

The issue of discrimination is explored by social scientists in their native domains of expertise such as anthropology, sociology, political science, etc. The literature, however, is not available on different types of discrimination in plenty on different dimensions of discrimination. Majority of research focuses only on explicit discrimination only. Further, while limited literature is available on analysis of economic aspects of discrimination in India, the evidence is negligible for the state of Punjab in particular.

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