

# Problems and Challenges Faced by Working Women in India: An Overview in the Context of Social Security

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## Abstract:

The social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. The attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not for others shades those who recruit employees. Thus, the women find employment easily as nurses, doctors, teachers and the caring and nurturing sectors, secretaries or in assembling jobs-the routine submissive sectors. But even if well qualified women engineers or managers or geologists are available, preference will be given to a male of equal qualification. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. When it comes to remuneration, the law proclaims equality but it is rarely put into practice. The inbuilt conviction that women are capable of less work than men or less efficient than men governs this injustice of unequal salaries and wages for the same job. The age old belief of male superiority over female creates several hurdles for women at their place of work. These problems tend to make women less eager to progress in their careers. A woman's work is not merely confined to paid employment. She has to always shoulder the burden of household chores as well. A woman could still bear up with these problems if she had control over the money she earns. But in most families, even now, her salary is handed over to father, husband or in-laws. So, the basic motive for seeking employment of getting independence is nullified in many women's case. The present study is carried to explore the real condition of Indian working women and investigates the factors preventing women employees from aspiring for higher posts. It also tries to identify the problems and challenges faced by working women in India and at the same time clarifies these issues and problems.

**Keywords:** Working Women, Employment, Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment

## Research Methodology:

This research work is based on secondary data. So, the descriptive and historical methods have been used to carry on the study.

## Objectives of the Study:

1. To explore the factors preventing women employees from aspiring for higher posts.
2. To identify the problems and challenges faced by working women in India.
3. To provide some policy recommendations to overcome these problems.

## Introduction

In the history of human development, women have been as vital in the history making as men have been. In fact higher status for women regarding employment and work performed by them in a society is a significant indicator of a nation's overall development. There are many reasons and problems that forced Indian women to work. The financial demands on the Indian families are increasing day by day. The sky rocketing cost of living, increasing expenses on education of children, increasing cost of housing properties in India force every family in India to look for ways and means of increasing the household income. As a result, women in India who were mostly known as homemakers are forced to go for jobs and take up even careers that were considered only suitable for men such as working in night shifts in call centers. Working women in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in other parts of the world. Besides of so many efforts from past years, female section of society is deprived in compared to male section. They are not given first priority in social and economic decisions in her own family. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, women are involved in doing 67% work of world, still they are socially and economically deprived. They are receiving only 10% of the universal income and have 1% part in global assets. This discrimination also persists in their work place in unorganized sector. In informal sector, women workers don't get same wages for same nature of work for same hours done by men. They are exploited at workplace. There are some acts like the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008, Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010 etc. but due to their improper implementation, women workers are forced to work and live in miserable conditions in unorganized sector. In India, men don't share on most of the household chores, it is women who have to cook, clean the house, do the dishes, wash clothes, get their children ready for school etc. On an average, women lost 2 hours of sleep per day and up to 14 hours sleep per week and if they happened to work in a highly pressurized environment, they have to bring their work home and that cuts few more hours of their sleep. It is not just about the reduced sleep, but such a lifestyle builds stress. It was alright for women to handle all the chores as long as they were homemakers. Now with their increasing need for getting some income for the family, they have to work all the more harder. They have to take up a 9 to 5 job plus handle all the household chores that they handled as a homemaker. They have to handle harassments at their work places, sometimes just over look things to ensure that their job is not threatened in anyway. Overall, majority of women in India live in a hope that things will change. Some of us have given up that hope and learnt to accept that nothing can be done about it. India has a long way to go before our women will be able to live their lives to the full.

## Women Employment in India

The increase in the number of women in the labour market signifies an important trend regarding women's employment in India. This has been occurring alongside increase in labour force and workforce, especially for urban women, although rural women workers predominate in terms of participation rates and overall magnitude. The increasing share of women's participation in the labour force and its significant contribution to household income as well as GDP require some policy attention be paid to the gender dimensions of the employment. The eleventh Five Year Plan document for the first time in the history of Indian planning recognizes women not only as equal citizens but as 'agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change' (GOI, 2008, p. 5). A multi-pronged approach is emphasized to address issues concerning women workers, such as provision of basic entitlements and strengthening of institutional mechanisms. The increase in the growth of employment appears to be much higher for female workers

compared to male workers. Even where the proportion of working women as reflected in the female work participation rate may be low, the absolute numbers have significantly increased, given the rate of population growth over time. The increase in work opportunities during the early years of the new millennium has been to the tune of 9.3 million jobs per annum (from 1999-2000 to 2004-05). This acceleration in employment growth from 1.25 percent per annum (1993-94 to 1999-2000) to 2.62 percent per annum in the period 1999-2000 to 2004-05 (GOI, 2008) has been beneficial to women's participation as well. Of the 46 million job opportunities created from 1999-2000 to 2004-05 (compared to 24 million in the earlier period, i.e., 1993-94 to 1999-2000), nearly 15 million women joined the workforce. Urban areas almost doubled their number of women workers, while in rural areas women workers increased from 9 to 12 million. This positive change is noted more forcefully in the urban context where requisite educational inputs and modern thinking regarding women's work is increasingly becoming noticeable. Rural agriculture is increasingly drawing women's labour supplies with over four-fifths of the women in rural areas working in agriculture. Thus, it seems that women in rural areas are finding it harder to shift away from agriculture. Involvement of women in agriculture is largely as cultivators as well as agricultural laborers. However, there has been a slight decline in the share of women as agricultural laborers, while their share among cultivators has increased. In urban areas, women have achieved substantially higher growth of employment in manufacturing and have been able to increase their share, especially after 1999-2000 (from 24 percent to over 28 percent in 2004-05). Thus, in urban areas, the share of female workers in manufacturing has increased substantially while that of male workers has not. Even in the services sector, women have gained in terms of employment, especially in the domestic and personal services category.

In a country like India, productive employment is central to poverty reduction strategy and to bring about economic equality in the society. But the results of unfettered operation of market forces are not always equitable, especially in India, where some groups are likely to be subjected to disadvantage as a result of globalization. Women constitute one such vulnerable group. Since globalization is introducing technological inputs, women are being marginalized in economic activities, men traditionally being offered new scopes of learning and training. Consequently, female workers are joining the informal sector or casual labour force more than ever before.

### **India's Female Population**

At the 2001 census, India had a female population of 496 million. India accounts 15% of World's women characterized by vast regional differences and a variety of cultures. But, social discrimination and economic deprivation on the basis of gender is common to all, irrespective of religion, cast, community and State. Empowerment of women, gender discrimination and violence against women which have become serious subjects of sociological research and social security of women in contemporary times, was previously neglected. While contemporary social changes have exposed women to unprotected socio-economic, cultural and political environment, there are no corresponding protective social systems and institutions of social justice to safeguard their interests. There are many who are doubtful about women's ability to exercise equal rights with men and about their capacity to play equal role with men. But such apprehensions are ill-founded in the context of broader opportunities available for women following mechanization of industry and agriculture, enabling women to compete with men successfully. Innovations in science and technology have removed the disparity between men and women attributed to physical strength alone. Women are able to handle modern appliances which require intelligence and

training and not merely physical strength. Thus, India has now several women working as pilots, driving locomotives, buses, tractors and machinery in workshops. Sex as maternal factor in the area of legal rights has practically disappeared. It is, therefore, not reasonable to demote women as a group to an inferior position in society. The Constitution does not regard sex as a permitted classification and prohibits sex as a basis of differential treatment in all areas of legal rights. Modernity has resulted in a growing flexibility and changes in the gender roles of men and women. The earlier conception that man was the provider of basic necessities for family and women the child bearer and care taker of house, is no longer valid in the changing social structure and economic compulsions. Working women refers to those in paid employment. They work as lawyers, nurses, doctors, teachers and secretaries etc. There is no profession today where women are not employed. However, it is true that working women have to face problems by virtue of their sex. For centuries, women have been subjected to exploitation and torture physically, sexually and mentally. There are innumerable problems and challenges faced by women both at home and work place.

### **Problems and Challenges Faced by Working Women in India**

Work and family are the two most important aspects in women's lives. Balancing work and family has become a key issue for many women in society. There are many facets in working mother's lives that are subject to the stresses and problems. Some of the main problems are highlighted as under:

#### **1. Mental harassment**

It is an age old convention that women are less capable and inefficient in working as compared to men. The attitude which considers women unfit for certain jobs holds back women. In spite of the constitutional provisions, gender bias creates obstacles in their recruitment. In addition to this, the same attitude governs injustice of unequal salaries for the same job. The true equality has not been achieved even after more than 70 years of independence. In order to achieve success in corporate sector, women feel that they must do better than their male colleagues. This leads to higher expectations and efficiency by their bosses and subordinates. Working in such conditions inevitably puts strain on women to greater extent as compared to men, thus making them less eager in their career.

#### **2. Sexual harassment**

Today, almost all working women are prone to sexual harassment irrespective of their status, personal characteristics and the types of their employment. They face sexual harassment on way on transports, at working places, educational institutions and hospitals, at home and even in police stations when they go to file complaints. It is shocking that the law protectors are violating and outraging modesty of women. Most of the women tend to be concentrated in the poor service jobs whereas men are in an immediate supervisory position which gives them an opportunity to exploit their subordinate women.

#### **3. Discrimination at Workplace**

However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. They are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at workplaces but this doesn't apply to all working women. A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labour-oriented industries.

#### **4. No Safety of Working Women While Traveling**

Typically, the orthodox mindset in the Indian society makes it difficult for a working woman to balance her domestic environment with the professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to work after six o'clock. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety

every day about a woman's safety while traveling. So many issues affect a working woman because she is closely protected or watched by her family and the society.

### **5. Lack of Family Support**

Lack of proper family support is another issue that working women suffers from. At times, the family doesn't support women to leave the household work and go to office. They also resist for women working till late in office which also hampers the performance of the women and this also affects their promotion.

### **6. Insufficient Maternity Leaves**

Insufficient maternity leave is another major issue that is faced by a working mother. This not only affects the performance of women employees at work, but is also detrimental to their personal lives.

### **7. Job insecurity**

Unrealistic expectations, especially in the time of corporate reorganizations, which sometimes puts unhealthy and unreasonable pressures on the employee, can be a tremendous source of stress and suffering. Increased workload, extremely long work hours and intense pressures to perform at peak levels all the time for the same pay, can actually leave an employee physically and emotionally drained. Excessive travel and too much time away from family also contribute to an employee's stresses.

### **8. Workplace Adjustment**

Adjusting to the workplace culture, whether in a new company or not, can be intensely stressful. Making oneself adapt to the various aspects of workplace culture such as communication patterns of the boss as well as the co-workers, can be lesson of life. Maladjustments to workplace cultures may lead to subtle conflicts with colleagues or even with superiors. In many cases office politics or gossips can be major stress inducers.

### **9. Lack of role models**

Women have time and again proved their capabilities in the work front but still, the top cream layer is mostly occupied by men. The challenge here is female leaders are many but role models are few. Hence when women try and look for leaders whom they can emulate, they are left behind. But this challenge is slowly minimizing as more and more women are entering as managers, politicians, presidents, CEO's and in the next few years to come, there will be more leaders who will turn role models for the generations to follow.

### **Recommendations:**

- Training programmes should be provided to self-employed workers to develop their self-confidence, self-esteem, courage and risk.
- Promote greater women business owner's equity by increasing women's assets through savings programmes, home ownership etc.
- Promote appropriate loan guarantee schemes.
- More awareness programmes should be conducted jointly by government and NGOs in order to make self-employment more attractive.
- Make a credit pool available to women from the smallest to the largest business opportunity in a secondary market for small business loans.
- Success stories of self employed women workers from varied backgrounds should be popularized through textbooks of schools and colleges. All possible media should be used to project these role models.

- Increase women's business success by promoting counseling services to women business owners from start-up to development and access to support networks for training, information, market development and child care.
- For economic security of women, it is necessary to develop co-operative credit societies where small amounts of money can be saved and used for giving better financial resources to self-employed women workers. This process would develop intended support among its members.
- Self-employed women workers should be trained in modern techniques and latest trends in activities like sewing, dairy, bakery, spinning, weaving leather products etc. so that productive utilization of their time and capacities can take place.
- Access to training and technological information has to be provided to self-employed women workers to improve their skills, level of decision making and effective participation.

### **Importance of Women in the Workforce**

As per research, companies who have a higher number of women in their workforce have gained high financial profits and productivity as their output, when compared to the companies which have fewer women employees. Being in this 21st century, where women have been equally capable and successful as men, gender diversity at the workplace should be made a mandatory rule. Moreover, the companies which have a diverse workforce are more successful when compared to other companies which are mostly male-dominated. Hiring women in the companies have many benefits as they are more focused, committed and successful. Workplaces are usually unequal and it is a global truth, one can easily understand it by seeing the pay, the positions, the designation what men and women get at work. But still, women have been victorious in making a mark on their own in this competitive market. The best part about hiring more women in the workplace not only helps you double your gains and increases your organization's productivity but also make the workplace a better place to work. Some of the top advantages of having gender diversity at the workplace are:

- Better job satisfaction
- The work turns out to be enjoyable and fun
- The dedication level towards the company will be higher
- Being positive and focused on company goals
- More meaningful work
- Have better opportunities to succeed
- Lesser burnout situations

### **Conclusion:**

Conditions of working women in India have improved considerably in the recent years. Ironically, despite the improvement in their status, they still find themselves dependent on men. It is because of the fact that man in patriarchal society has always wielded economic independence and power to take decision. Since the working woman earns an independent income in the same patriarchal set-up where the basic infrastructure of society has hardly changed, though her own role within the same structure is passing through a transitional phase, it is but natural that she would remain vulnerable to exploitation even in her economically independent state. Society perhaps yet needs to accord due recognition to women to take the lead role and women at the same time, need to be oriented vigorously towards assuming this role in the society. The problems of self employed women workers are multi-dimensional. These can be solved by

the coordinated efforts of self employed women workers, coordinated functioning of promotional agencies and government assistance without red tape or bureaucratic delays. The self-employed women workers has to be educated and she should have a proper training in acquiring the necessary skill in running an enterprise. Once all the problems are soothed out there is no looking back at all. Women are capable of being as good as or even better than men in business. If formal training is imparted to women they could acquire skills required and can contribute in a big way to the nation's prosperity. Given the right opportunities and encouragement they will be very successful and eventually overcome all the problems.

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