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Abstract

Women play a very important role in society as well as the economic development of the country. The contribution of women to economic growth is very significant. Nowadays they are contributing in every sector of the economy viz. banking, finance, defense, manufacturing, education, insurance, information technology, telecommunication, and agriculture etc. Women are hardworking by nature and have proved their worth to be good managers. They are efficient in planning, managing and effective utilization of resources. They play a significant role in meeting social responsibilities and community development. There is a number of career opportunities for women in business as well as in employment. However, there are various challenges which they face while being in employment. This paper aims at analyzing the opportunities and challenges of employment faced by women in India. The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Major challenges faced by women during employment as revealed by the present study are social structure, work-life imbalance, gender discrimination, maternity issues, mobility & transfer issues, security, unsupportive bosses, sexual harassment and non-inclusive workplace etc.

Keywords: Women Employment, Issues and Challenges, Economic Development.

Introduction

Since ancient times, the significance of work done and services provided by Indian women had no recognition. They were limited to household work and agriculture. However, their participation was not recognized with economic value. Their contribution in various sectors like agriculture, handicraft, sewing, weaving, taking care of children, household works etc. is not documented and not shown in official statistics. Women are mostly engaged in informal sectors which do not present statistical data. Our cultural structure restricts women to go out and work in other fields with men. They are held responsible for all the household work such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water and taking care of the family including children and adults. However, it is considered just as their responsibility and not accounted as work. Such responsibility is forced on them throughout their life without giving any recognition in terms of economic value. Man is considered as the main bread earner of the family. However, on the emergence of globalization and changing environment, women have become more empowered and proved their economic worth. They have proved their presence and contribution in almost every industry and in huge numbers.

Employment Opportunities for Women in India

Now a day, women have shifted their contribution from agricultural work to non-agricultural work. They are pursuing higher education and get access to white collar jobs. They are now participating in every sector such as banking, defense, finance, insurance, education, production, marketing and entertainment etc. Less educated women are mainly participating in construction work, stores, factories, MGNREGA and other works. Middle-income group women who are more educated mainly contribute to medical & health services, teaching, banking, insurance, social welfare services and administrative services etc. Elite group women have gained exposure to global networks, international platforms, Parliamentary services and business enterprises & corporate etc. Indian Government is also promoting higher education and participation of women in the economy and administration. It has launched various women empowerment schemes. Following qualities of women make them more competent than men and bring higher career opportunities to them.

- Strong will power
- High emotional quotient
- Easily adaptable to the change
- Well organized

- Determination
- Consistency
- Quality of handling pressure
- Multitasking

Issues and Challenges Faced by Women in Employment

Despite various government schemes for women empowerment and educational facilities, labor force participation of women in India is the lowest in the world after Saudi Arabia. According to a survey, women participation in the labor force was just 28.5% in 2017. Three out of four Indian women are not working. The present study analyses and ascertains the issues and challenges faced by women in employment. Following are the main employment challenges faced by women in India:

Social and Cultural Structure: According to Indian culture, the primary responsibility of women is to take care of the family and the household. It doesn't encourage women to work outside the house. Man is expected to earn economic benefits for the family. Even if a woman is employed outside, she has to first complete the household works then only she can go for employment.

Gender Bias: Gender bias comes at the stage of recruitment itself. A woman with the same qualification, experience and competency as that of her counterpart male is not recruited because it is considered that women are less efficient and less capable. Many companies offer job vacancies to men only due to frequent travels in the job or high-power physical work etc. Fields like marketing are dominated and ruled by men since ever. Women are not generally appointed for marketing jobs or other touring jobs which require frequent travels and door to door selling. It is straightly asked at the time of interview that if a woman is married or planning for children. The same thing is not asked by men. It is considered that a woman cannot efficiently take the responsibility of children and family along with the company duties and objectives. Many companies do not provide for maternity leave and other flexible perks for women. Hence, sometimes a woman has to choose between the dream job and the family.

Maternity Issues: Government organizations and some 138 corporate grant maternity leaves but others either do not grant or grant for lesser days. Generally, maternity leaves are granted up to two children only. It becomes very difficult for working women to pay

attention to the work when the child is crying and waiting for its mother. Similarly, no leaves are granted for pregnancy. For a pregnant woman it is very hard to handle mood swings, morning sickness, discomfort with a baby belly and traveling to or from the job etc. It becomes more difficult for women in entertainment, fashion and modeling industries as they are afraid of having a baby or getting married because their career would be on stake.

Mobility and transfer issues: It is difficult for women to pursue employment outside their home town. As they have to fulfill their household and social responsibilities to take care of the family. It is also difficult for women to travel long distances every day for employment. Distance remains a constraint for women throughout her life and that becomes a barrier for her in handling teams. And due to such reasons, women have to give up the idea of continuing to work as a leader.

Unequal Pay: In India, women are paid significantly less as compared to the male worker for a similar job. They are paid 10 to 30 percent lesser wages than male workers. The main reason is our social structure and culture where women are considered less efficient & weaker when it comes to physical or intellectual work. Man is considered as the breadwinner for the family. Another reason is that women are more accepting and afraid to raise their voice.

Sexual Harassment: Women face various kinds of harassment at the workplace. It includes molestation, eve teasing, sexual advantage, stalking, sexual assault, offensive comments & threats and sexual harassment. Harassment is not only at the workplace, but it is also faced more commonly during the travel to and from the workplace. Such harassment makes it difficult for women to continue their employment. It is a downfall in women leadership at the workplace. In some cases, women fall prey to cunning men who lure them on the pretext of love and sexually harass them. Many men have the notion that working women are compromising in nature which is the foundation for such vicious deeds.

Work-life imbalance: Another noticeable challenge that the working women face is a work-life imbalance. Sometimes their personal life tends to suffer due to work commitments. On the other hand, in some cases they have to forgo the career opportunities for their family and children. Our society expects women to prioritize their household requirements over

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official work. Women have to spend long hours in office which results in having difficulty in meeting the demands of society and family. In such cases, women choose family over their career. Many women are emotionally or physically abused at home as well as at the workplace but they don't let anybody know about it.

Security: Security is one of the biggest and threatening challenges for women in the workplace. More and more cases of physical assault and abuse are being reported in dailies and news channels. Late night shifts are the most vulnerable and a threat to the security of women workers. Women don't feel themselves secure during late hours in the office as well as traveling to or from the office.

Unsupportive Bosses: Some managers don't give adequate credits and recognition to the women workers. They have the mindset that women are not competent enough. Such managers block opportunities for women to succeed. Men and women are two parts of the same coin. Each one of them has a unique charisma. Each one thinks and handles the situation differently. However, women are underrepresented at every level. Their ability to lead is often undermined by gender stereotypes. It is stereotyped that women are meant to take care and men are meant to take charge. It makes women working twice as hard as their male counterparts. Women are judged as being over smart or under-talented but never just right and capable. Women leaders are either taken as competent or liked but not both. Many women leaders have accepted that it took them a hard time and courage to survive the power play politics and reach their current position in their workplace.

Non-Inclusive Workplaces: Women feel like outsiders in the workplace because of their gender, different sexual orientation and different thought process etc. They feel often excluded, dismissed and ignored. It consequently costs largely to the organization in the form of lowered job satisfaction, reduced work efforts, diminished employee voice, and greater intention to leave.

Lack of Role Models: There are a few powerful examples of women role models in workplaces. Women have 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. While male leaders train and

guide their successor with full vigor. However, a women leader learns everything the harder way. When women seek guidance and mentorship from men, they feel unrelated and disoriented because there is a significant difference in objectivity and style of communication for both of them.

Office politics: Women are driven by emotions and instinct, they are sensitive. It is one of the toughest challenges for them to survive office politics which hurt them deeply and disturb their mental peace. It leads to a lack of efficiency, dissatisfaction for job and distraction from the goals.

Discrimination at the workplace: While a man may be practical on the other side, a woman could think farfetched. However, irrespective of being equally talented there is always discrimination for women leaders. In the competitive environments of the corporate, where both men and women participate in all activities and tasks with equal vigor and enthusiasm such discrimination is the biggest challenge for a woman. A woman should be recognized with her talent and not her gender. As colleague men and women need to combine their synergies and work in union such discrimination is backwardness at the workplace.

Ego Clashes: The male ego is also a great challenge for women in the workplace as well as at home. At home, men do support women to go out and work but once she starts performing better and earning higher packages than their male counterpart, ego comes in the way. Such men find it difficult to accept the progress and achievements of their women whether she is a wife or a colleague. Egoistical men at the workplace tend to refuse taking orders from a female. It makes difficult for women leaders to get the job done from such kind of subordinates. This is the kind of inequality and discrimination which hinders the acceptability of women as successful leaders.

Conclusion

In the present era of globalization and economic development, the participation of women in various economic sectors has been increased. Women have significantly proved their worth and participation in the economy. Today's woman is an empowered woman and well educated as well. The government has also supported women upliftment through various schemes and policies. They are not restricted to the household and family. They are harvesting

great career opportunities in the developing economic environment. They are good leaders, worthy contributors, efficient decision makers and great organizers. The journey of women from a homemaker to get engaged in employment under various sectors has been very difficult and struggling. Though women are climbing ladders of success in every aspect, they are still facing the challenges which create obstacles in their success and emerging careers. The main challenge for working women is the mindset developed under the Indian social structure where women are not supported to work outside and constrained to household responsibilities. Gender bias is another big challenge due to which women are considered less capable than men and not recruited under jobs which are predominated by men. Women have to play dual work as a mother and caretaker of the family as well as a worker of the organization. Being a mother, it becomes difficult at times to efficiently play both the roles. Also in many cases, working in a different city and leaving the family behind is a big challenge in pursuing their career. When they are not paid equally to men for the same job, it is very disheartening to women workers. Sexual harassment is a throwback for women workers to pursue their employment. Security is the aspect which every organism seeks for its life. Similarly, the safety of women in the workplace is very important for them to continue to be in employment. Workplace environment signifies various challenges for women workers such as non-inclusive behavior of the colleague, unsupportive managers, office politics, ego of subordinate staff and discrimination for female leaders.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made to overcome the challenges in employment faced by women.

- First of all the mindset of the Indian societies must be changed towards the engagement of women in employment other than household work. They must be supported and encouraged to work according to their talent and dreams.
- Organizations need to put serious efforts to remove gender bias in the workplace.
- Women workers should be given maternity and childcare leaves to take care of their children and it should not be restricted up to

two children. Provision for leaves during pregnancy for regular health checkups and other issues should be made. Women workers should be given specific perks and other required benefits during pregnancy.

- Women employees should be posted in their home town or nearby places so that their family does not feel neglected.
- Organizations must ensure that women should be paid equal wages to men for similar tasks.
- Policies and provisions given under laws regarding the protection of women against sexual harassment should be strengthened and strictly implemented.
- All aspects of safety and security of women workers should be strictly implemented by the organizations.
- Participation of women workers at workplace should be increased. It should be ensured that they are appraised for their achievements and motivated in a progressive manner.
- Family support is the most important thing which plays an important role in the career of women leaders.
- Talent and competency of women leaders should be recognized and examples need to be set for other women to follow as role models.

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