



CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

We all talk of gender equality, woman empowerment and female education; but how far have we achieved it in reality? Coming this far, evolving, civilizing, modernizing; the lot of women has changed very less in reality. Though well educated, employed and marching ahead; like men, working women face a lot of challenges and problems.

KEYWORDS; woman empowerment and female education , evolving, civilizing.

INTRODUCTION

To mark her identity, to be independent, to earn a living, to run her family or to support her husband ... there are numerous reasons today why women have stepped out of their home, to work and to earn. Breaking off her traditional image of a home maker, women today are taking up new roles and challenges at work and career.

A woman plays so many roles (of a daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother...) and for ages she has been a multi-tasker; one who cooks food, does the domestic chores, raises kids, and cares for everyone in her family. She works 24X7, never complains and never asks for any remuneration in return.

Her tasks and challenges have increased and hardened multifold now when she is super multi-tasking, juggling between career, travelling, kitchen, kids, husband, house, society, personal health, passion and desires. Balancing between so many duties and obligations, a woman faces numerous challenges and problems every day, every time, and may be every second minute or second.

In the past few decades, the role of women in our society has been drastically changed. Women can be seen as fighter-jet pilots, educationists, lawyers, customer services head, company executives, administration heads, as well as in the field of banking, human resources

and telecom sector. Women are making a tremendous contribution in each sector. Men are no longer considered as the only bread winner of the house. Women of the family are now also financially supporting their family. Though the number of working women is increasing day by day but still there are certain barriers that they have to cross to prove themselves beneficial for the job market.

Though Indian women are far more independent and aware of their legal rights, such as right to work, equal treatment, property and maintenance, a majority of women remain unaware of these rights. There are other factors that affect their quality of life such as age of marriage, extent of literacy, role in the family and so on. In many families, women do not have a voice in anything while in several families; the women may have a dominating role. The result is that the empowerment of women in India is highly unbalanced and with huge gaps. Those who are economically independent and literate live the kind of life that other women tend to envy about. This disparity is also a cause for worry because balanced development is not taking place. Here is a simplistic summary of what all a working woman has to face in her daily life, the challenges and the problems:

GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATION:

Working men are usually given unfair advantage in comparison to the working women. In this male dominated society, men are considered more hardworking, intelligent and better employees than women. This gender discrimination results in increased level of stress and job dissatisfaction. It also decreases the motivation to work and commitment towards the job.

Basically women are given lesser opportunities for quality education which in turn results in lack of knowledge regarding technological advancement. Discrimination starts at the very level of recruitment and interview, where recruiters/interviewers see women incompetent for challenging roles and ask questions like whether you would be able to continue after marriage.

DOMESTIC RESTRICTIONS AND FAMILY DUTIES:

Earlier women were restricted to their home and their primary role was to take care of household chores. With time, due to increase in economic pressures on families this restriction has been released. Now in most of the families women are also allowed to get higher education and do paid jobs but under certain restrictions. The maximum percentage of working women can be seen as health workers, educationist, clerks or any other low paid job that are not much preferred by men because of the lack of growth opportunities and low pay-scale. Women are allowed to do such jobs because of the male dominated environment. This thing has restricted women's exposure to other available opportunities and limited their growth in the developmental sector. After all day of work at office, no matter how tired they are, they also have to look after domestic chores. In today's modern era, even after working in the corporate world and after taking up challenging roles of executives/directors/marketing professional/IT professionals, etc.; the age old image of a woman of being a home-maker has not changed much. Even if she works, comes home tired/has to leave early for office; she is expected to cook

food, take care of kids and all other household duties and the male counterparts may volunteer but they hold no responsibilities.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT:

Every single day a woman when steps out, stays out whole day working while travelling, in office, in field, in canteen, in outdoor meetings...; directly/indirectly she is subjected to a lot of sexual abuses and harassment. It's not always with hands she is hurt, but she is attacked and hurt with eyes, with tongue, with gestures and of course unfortunately physically. A few women wave off, ignore and move on; some disgust them to the very soul, out there is no way out so with tears or suppressed anger they move on; while some root off their dignity and even existence. To some women have to compromise, to some escape routes, while some compel them to revolt or break down. And it's no less than a part of the working women, directly or indirectly, to a small and ignorant to large scale.

LOWER PAY-SCALE:

The employer should ensure that uniform wages should be paid to both men and women on an equal amount of work done. In many workplaces, employees are not allowed to discuss their salaries because of which no one ever comes to know if they are paid less or not. Bullying, harassment and abusing are vivid acts but lower wages is a silent offense, no one makes any complaint and the problem continues.

Women are paid less because the employer has this preset concept that she will quit the job after marriage or after having children. Women earn low also because they have to choose a less challenging job for themselves so they can spend more time at home. Parenthood affects the woman's career adversely in contrast to men.

The organization should offer some family-friendly policy and also make sure equal wages should be given to the employees without gender discrimination. Remaining silent on such issues means that we are silently supporting this crime.

MARRIED WORKING WOMEN:

Most of the married women are not allowed to do a job and also, it becomes difficult for them to maintain work and household chores equilibrium because of increased responsibility. Traditionally, men are the bread winners of the house and it is not appreciable if women support the family financially or if women earn more than men.

Married working women also face problems at work. It is not possible for them to work in late hours. Most of the workplaces do not have nurseries or daycares where mothers can keep their children.

EGO OF MALE COUNTERPART:

One of the most tough to handle challenges is to manage and cope with the ego of your male counterpart as a wife/partner. Males do support women to go out and work, but somewhere they find it hard to accept the progress and achievement of women whether she is his colleague or life partner.

Non-acceptance of Talent, Offered Disrespect:

A woman going out to work in many societies is considered very low and questions are raised about her character. A working woman who is beautiful or well-maintained or presentable or is friendly with everyone and is progressing in her career instead of being complimented is disrespected and looked down upon by many people in the society; is always questioned and people pass remarks on her dignity and morals.

Negative attitudes of male co-workers:

Attitude of male co-workers is sometimes really humiliating and biased. It is considered that women are hired just to add colour to the office environment. Lack of proper environment in workplace and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors leads to absenteeism, low turnover and job dissatisfaction among women. Higher authorities should try to establish a supportive and conducive work environment.

Inequality as in Provision of Opportunities in Terms of Job Responsibilities, Projects and Organizational Advancement:

One of the most unfortunate challenges for women that they are subject to undergo at work despite all their qualifications, skills, talent, hard work and performance; is to be overlooked and low rated in comparison to their male colleagues. This is one reason, why many women have to settle down at less challenging jobs than their capabilities/talent, or get stuck at an irrelevant job/field or get stuck at one point of career with no opportunities for further growth, etc.

Low Dignity and No Ownership of Her Own Earning:

Mostly women are not seen as independent earners, who command respect and dignity. Instead is seen as a small back-wheel of a heavy vehicle and thus, her role and contribution is mostly over looked. In most of the families, especially middle class, upper middle class and lower middle class; it's seen that the income of the woman either goes in the hands of her father or husband, rather than in her hands.

Transport:

The transport system in our country is very poor. This is a big hindrance for the women who have to go out for a job. Men and women both have to face this problem. Despite the inadequate availability of the public transport, women also have to face harassment. They are bound to travel on buses and vans because taxis are expensive. The government should address this problem on a priority basis. Separate public transport can solve this issue.

Measures to be undertaken:

To face challenges successfully, women need to be self-confident and should keep themselves up to date with the latest happenings in the world of technology. The internet has now solved the problem of limited opportunities, as every internet savvy person can access the world of knowledge and information. So women should keep surfing the internet to increase

their knowledge. Good communication skill is also a necessity; it helps in building social network which in turn helps in appraising whenever there are new opportunities available. Meeting deadlines is also important to prove yourself worthy. Another most important thing is to maintain balance in work and personal life.

Also there is a need to educate men and tell them to respect other women like they respect women in their family. They should show flexibility in their attitude and should accept that women can perform even better than them.

Thus, while discussing the issues and concerns about working women, the main emphasis should be on the 'opportunities for women', as it is of utmost importance. Like every human being, a woman has a 'natural desire for the expression of her inborn knack and abilities'; even a small baby shows his natural guts through his actions and movements. So, if a woman learns something, she craves for expressing it in some way. It is quite encouraging that nowadays, women have much more opportunities and prospects for the assertion of their individuality and talents. The services sector has increased the chances for women with its comfortable environment, where they can actively participate and excel, even from a distant place. Hence, if the focus is right, this issue will, hopefully, find its way towards a positive solution.

In short we need revamp in all round corners with respect to working women's lives. We need to help each other, join together in chorus to raise our issues, put them in a proposal to government for new legislations angled at improving working women's lives.

A couple of visibly clear steps the government can take to improving working women's lives are:

- Give higher interest in all bank deposits to women,
- Give 30-50 Per cent discount in all Rail/bus/plane fares to women,
- Legislate strict laws against sexual harassment in offices,
- Setup special courts for handling complaints of working women against their employers,
- Legislate leeway for special leaves needed by working women,
- Legislate laws to curb inequality,

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