

Balance for Better: an Analysis of Women's Working Conditions

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Abstract: As duality of universe like day and night exists for its movement of forwardness, the opposition of women and men is an undeniable element for running the society. In the history the gender impartiality has showed a significant role in the growth of economic and social development of the society. Because of that, calls for better balance between male and female participation become more feasible and sensible. Hence, in the backdrop of recent women friendly labour laws and old labour law's amendments like the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, States's Shops and Establishments Acts and the central government liberalisation in the Factories Act, 1948, in 2015 and newly eased out policies of recruitment to allow women workers to work in underground coal mines, are being examined the women's labour participation position in the country. It resulted that to score, gender balance, not only the in workplace but at political, economic and social levels, generally depends on the evolution of the mind-set of the society, where should have the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender for economic participation, decision-making, valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs with support of women-friendly policies and programme based on labour regulations and its proper implementation.

Index terms: gender balance, labour regulations, workplace, Labour Participation, Balance for Better'

I. INTRODUCTION

'Balance for Better'¹ is one of the campaign themes of 2019 and 2010, International Women's Day, that sounds the future is exciting and wants to be built up a gender-balanced society for a better world as UN-women envisages a world of sustainable development before 2030².

In the history the femininity, impartiality has showed a significant role in fiscal development. This has indicated in the several scholarly articles as if poorer womanly labour force contribution or weak entrepreneurial movement down casts economic development (World Bank, 2012), the campaign theme 'Balance for Better' reminds to look at how far gender balance has been achieved by India in the field of employments, especially in the context of working-age population of the country is expected to expand to 18.6 per cent of the global labour force by 2027 (Catalyst, 2018) as a largest labour participated country in the world, presently from second position.

The studies cited that early the gender issue in labour market was not a matter of concern but it is a recent origin (ILO, 2018). It is evident from the initial labour market theories and studies were confined to male workers. But it doesn't mean that in the beginning there were no presences of females in the labour market. However, recently the women started entering into labour market large in number. Successively, gender issues assumed prominence in the study of labour market that provided chance to enact and amendments of women friendly labour laws. These regulations are: The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, The Factories Act, 1948, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, States's Shops and Establishments Acts.

More than that in the backdrop of the central government liberalisation in the Factories Act, 1948, in 2015 and recently eased out policies of recruitment to allow women workers to work in underground coal mines, the question of women's labour participation in the country become more reasonable. According to the amendment of the Factories Act, 1948 the Government allowed women to work at their desired timing - night shift instead of banning them to work after 7 pm to 6 am, provided the company make sure of implementation of facilities of women safety. Through amendment of mines act 1952 also revoked more than 60-year-old law that prohibited women to work even in the surface of mines during night shifts.

II. THE WOMEN LEFT BEHIND IN THE WORKPLACE

A. Low Rate of Labour Participation

1. International Labour Organization (ILO) calculated the female labour participation has declined in India in 1990 from 35.11 to 26.97 per cent in 2017. It means India ranks 120th position among 131 nations in the matter of women workforce³, (World Bank, 2018).

Despite educational gained higher levels nearly 27 per cent of women, whereas 27 per cent of men were enrolled only in the tertiary kind of education, the labour force participation rate for women in 2017 was only 28.5 per cent equated to 82 per cent for males⁴.

The census of 2011⁵ has shown that the lowest female labour force participation ratio of 33 per cent suggests that merely 125 million beyond 380 million working-ages Indian feminines were in search of work to be employed

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Additionally, India's femininity gap in involvement between men and women was one of the broadest in the midst of G-20 economies having above 50 per cent. These gender gaps are growing wider as in both urban and rural areas respectively 60 and 45 percentage points⁶. (Erin K. Fletcher, Pande, and Moore, 2017)

In addition to the lowest female labour force participation, of late, it has been indicated that young Indian women have been moving into non-traditional professional jobs like communication and finance⁷, which require high skills

In case of self-employment and entrepreneurship, according to the Sixth Economic Census (2013-2014) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, women constitute a meagre 14 per cent of the total entrepreneurs in India i.e. 8.05 million out of 58.5 million entrepreneurs⁸.

A. Evolution of Women Workforce

In history, the evolution of women workforce and their adversities are often unheeded when studying the progression of society. Since the beginning of time women has gone through a series of tussles to prove their competence by being a dynamic part of the labour force.

In the beginning, women were expected to stay home to take care of their children and perform household tasks, while the men were the bread earners. However, later in 1940 onwards, this creed began to shift as women started to enter the civil workforce. This significantly promoted a sense of freedom for women in the society. Subsequently, while women became prominent workers, many acts and laws were being proposed for equal working rights. Yet the history stated 1950s-1960s was a period of confusion for working women in the society. Because these were the periods, the society debated whether women to stay home to take care of household work and children, or to join the workforce. At the same time in those situations, the service sectors were also open to women. It resulted during the 1970s when most of the women felt comfortable in the labour market, (Shah, 2015).

.In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when more women started joining the corporate workforce (Erin K. Fletcher, Pande, and Moore 2017) and recently, a fresh study from 'Accenture' titled "Getting to Equal: How Digital is Helping Close the Gender Gap at Work" has found that digital eloquence shows a vital part in helping women to achieve gender equality in the workplace. As per its findings in India with digital proficiency the women have a better advantage to find a job. For, it stated that 81 per cent of males use the digital field to make for and find labour as opposed to 74 per cent females (Accenture, 2016)⁹.

In this context, the studies opined that in today's labour market women are more precision-focused, process-oriented and emotionally balanced employees. And again being good trouble solvers, they have a greater ability to understand issues fast and solve them conveniently. They have also the capacity to bring better human equations to the work atmosphere. These were the reasons behind NITI Aayog recently commended that Indian economy could be shown the growth rate between 9 to 10 per cent if there is a gender equivalence in the country, and the share of women

workforce is increased to 48 per cent from the current 24 per cent (Kant, 2018)¹⁰.

B. Mind-sets towards Female Workers

The imbalance between female and male employment in the labour society starts from advertisements itself of the job as it cited 'unmarried female preferable' and in an interview often heard a question to women candidates 'are you married?'. This gender bias attitude sounds very much for women leaving behind in the labour market.

The great challenge of the working women of today is to face imbalance between work and life. She has to keep a balance between works and family life. She actually tends to sacrifice either one or other due to its priorities. Very often women are left alone in the stage of pregnancy at the workplace. Due to the pregnancy discrimination attitude of employers, many women are scared of starting a family. Recently a study (Government of India, 2018)¹¹ report stated that in India almost 50,000 women in a year lose their careers due to pregnancy and maternity impact. And again many female workers realised at the points of return after maternity leave that they had to be faced the reality of changes in their job duties and lack of promotion or progress in employments.

In addition to pregnancy discrimination, the male counterparts find very difficult to understand the woman's menstrual cycle time issues. They think that ladies use it as a pretext to take leave, even if they were really weak in period time.

Besides the racial or ethnical racism happens in the workplace, the career advancement like promotions, increase in salary for fresh female employees, who must to work tougher than their men colleagues. The reason for this is nameless, however in most of the workstations, there's a common sentiment that menfolk progress sooner.

Generally, females are being considered by patriarchal society as 'incompetent'. As a result there is tendency not to give sufficient opportunities to prove themselves. At the same time, most working women are having fear and scared to take risks by thinking that their work would happen failure. Or they would be wondering if everyone around them may question about their abilities even if they are in the position and they have the skills for it.

Simultaneously in the case of women in power, they would usually face man of ego, who declines to take instructions from a female and belittling attitude of men through which inequality still exists in today's working world.

C. Inefficacy of Female-Friendly, Labour Laws

Apart from several labour laws, these provide benefits and security to all both male female employees; there are certain enactments in India which exist as on date, which meant only for women employees. These are, the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Yet, all these laws' gist hasn't been considered properly.

The workplace sexism and harassment against women have become other horrific challenges in the workplace today. The increase of sexual harassment cases and 'Me Too India' campaign are good indications to underline the truth of women's hardships in the workstations.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work remains unimplemented in almost all the organisations. As per the data¹², the recorded instances of sexual harassment at Indian place of works enlarged 54 per cent from 371 in 2014 to 570 in 2017. According to the official data, within seven months of 2018, still July 27, 533 incidents of sexual harassment were testified crosswise the country.

As daylight, another area of women left behind at workplace is unequal payment cases. The identical salary for the same works is still an aloof imaginary for Indian females. Article 39 of the Indian Constitution foresees that the States would have a rule for acquiring equal salary for equal labour for both males and females. To provide outcome to this constitutional provision, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was enacted. However, the study of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2017 (Mirror Now, 2018)¹³, indicated the exciting levels of inequality in remunerations for womenfolk in India. Its survey obviously, reflected that men receive more than their women equals for parallel employments. The disparity break in many circumstances was as astonishing as 30 per cent.

D. Informal Sector Female Workers

The informal sector workers or unorganised workers, again recently known as 'working poor'¹⁴, among them largely women are unseen and unheard; even these employment sectors are a vast basis of occupation for womenfolk than menfolk in developing country like India. As per 2012 figures¹⁵ indicated that in India 95 per cent of women working in the informal sector. Females' work in informal sector, mainly comprises self-employment, trivial trades, foodstuff processing, or in family units of traditional employments like agriculture and lives stocks or industrial units that are minor plants spread around or in several systems of putting out establishments near to settlements, or daily wage workers who work in uncertain and vulnerable jobs like domestic work, laundry, scavenging, and garments units etc.

The reasons for leaving women behind in the informal sector are they have been working without time limit and documentation and in the form of unpaid workers in the houses. The informal economy the women have been concentrating in more precarious and lower-earning forms of works as compared to men. They are less likely to be employers and more likely to be unpaid contributing family members or casual wage workers.

Further, due to overrepresentation in the sectors, the unskilled and flexible nature they have been considered as the cheap source of labour without economic and social security¹⁶. Therefore, informal womenfolk's workers, in particular, are in in danger positions than their men equivalents.

III. CREATING A WOMEN-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

To score, gender balance in the workplace generally depends on the evolution of the mindset of the society, where will be the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender for economic participation, decision-making, valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs (Shah, 2015)¹⁷. But in order to build a gender balanced workplace, first and foremost there should have back up of women-friendly policies and programme based on labour regulations and its proper implementation because women want to work and feel rewarded and cared for with their work.

To set up a women-friendly workplace a cultural shift is inevitable as a result of changed mind-set of the society. This culture would promote facilities for women workers like a separate restroom at the workplace, child-friendly facilities pick and drop arrangements, a chance to be women executives, effort to let it off the patriarchal attitude of male employees, flexibility work timings, including working from home.

According to the recent survey findings, almost half of Indian employees ready to leave the job for more flexibility¹⁸. Flexible work timings are an advantage for women who have to share a greater burden of domestic responsibilities including motherhood. Organisations with operations in IT, on-call services and software support that can be managed distantly, can benefit enormously by enhancing the flexibility for their workforce.

Making efforts to keep up women-friendly work culture is much more desirable and all kinds of supporting women specific requirements, including different skill up gradation programs, rules and regulations wherein, would happen the benefits of diversity in the society.

Last but not least over the years, several enactments and facilities have been passed or implemented for the welfare of the working people and protection of Indian employee rights, including labour laws related to female workers, are the part of the public information that has been imparted to the female workers properly and periodically.

IV. CONCLUSION

India has come a long way throughout history by achieving a commendable position in economic power. In the way of India's developing mixed economy has had the world's seventh-largest economy rank by nominal GDP \$2,134 and the third-largest by purchasing power with \$ 7,783 as of 2018¹⁹.

However, in contrary India's grade was 130 on 2018 Human Development Index table (UNDP, 2019)²⁰. One of the reasons for India's low ranking in the human development Index is less female participation in the labour market that echoes women's status significantly less politically, economically and socially empowered than men.

To have better a balancing labour market, holding mentioned above realities with regarding women employees, let not forget men and women are two sides of the human being who

runs the world. The bureaucratic, workers' unions, employers' associations and researchers ever more admit that works of women and men equally important as fundamental principles to have rights at work. It ensures provisions of social protection, decent employment conditions and the ruling of acts. Wherein would also be a positive impact on the development of defensible initiatives in terms of high outputs and public returns.

Consequently, it could be concluded that the organisations which have gender-balanced persons in all the positions would reap better financial results and having a greater gender diversity could bring enormous long-term benefits. So everyone has a part to play - all the time, everywhere from grassroots activism to worldwide action, to enter an exciting period of history where the world expects balance. Because balance has driven a better working world since then let's all help to create a balance for a better world.

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