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## STATUS OF WORKING WOMEN AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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### Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze the status of Working Women in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Employees. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely from secondary sources. The study reveals that women employees of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status. Crimes against women, Policy implications.

### INTRODUCTION

*“Women are the world's most under used resource.” – Hilary Clinton*

“We are most fortunate to be living through times of high transition in business and society and those who will embrace the challenges and winds of change will also be the authentic leaders who will be well rewarded to high distinction, stature and profits of innovative thinking” PoonamBarua<sup>1</sup>

The increasing commitment of women executives for becoming a part of the changing business format and the differentiating styles of leadership that women are bringing to their roles across organizations is forever changing the way the companies are responding to future markets, ethical leadership and defining talent for the fast growing economies.<sup>2</sup>

“Women make up half the human resources available to any Country. If this half is not being channeled into the economy or being made a part of decision-making processes, the country's economic potential is hence bound to suffer. As business –leaders and policy makers sell to navigate their way through the current crisis, they need the talents of both men and women to come up with the best solution” SaadiaZahidi<sup>3</sup>

Women executives contributes dramatically for reorienting values, and culture of business and society alike. Women are widely judged to be better than men in dealing with the social issues. Through their leadership context and power dynamics, women fare relatively better for standing up for one's principles in the face of political pressures; being able to work out compromises; thereby driving an inclusive approach in the interest of the overall population.

While women possess distinct and persuasive leadership styles, mastering new skill-sets which will enable them to establish greater credibility in the industry, thereby adding value to themselves and the organization. Dedicated women's executive education programs are capable of enhancing women's functional expertise and this intellectual capacity open doors to greater achievements. Women represent 50% of world population but receive only 10% of the world income and less than 1% of the world's assets. The gap in women's participation to world's income is due to various social and personal constraints. Efforts are being made by various governmental and non-governmental agencies all over the world to promote women in almost all the development aspects and this lead to encouraging results. According to a United National Report economic development is closely related to the advancement of women. In nations where women are in a advanced state economic growth has usually been steady. In contrast countries where women are restricted, the economy has been stagnant.

Indian women come a long way with the changing times.

Following are some interesting facts on the status of women in Modern India;

- India has the world's largest number of professionally qualified women.
- India has more female doctors, surgeons, scientists and professors than the United States.
- India has more working women than any other country in the world. This included female worker at all levels of skill-from the surgeon and the airline pilot to bus conductor and menial laborers.(MadhurimaLall, ShikhaSahai 2014)

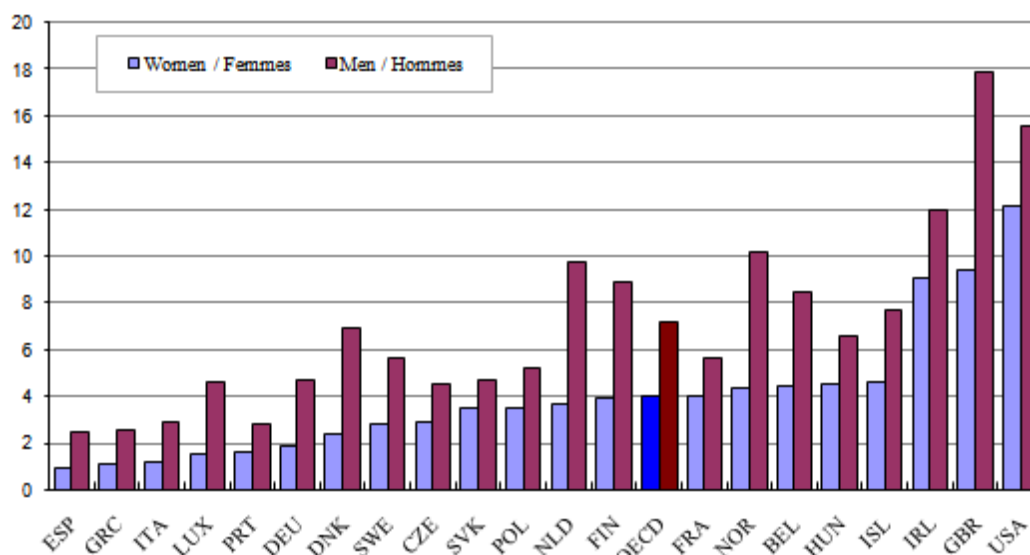
Women employees in India are happier than their male colleagues with their current profile and organization according to a survey conducted by global consultancy giant Accenture in December 2015. A great number of women (40 percent) are satisfied with their current job and are not looking for new job opportunities as compared to men (28 percent).<sup>5</sup>

The dissatisfaction level is higher among the male workers at the global level but the gap is narrower than in India. Interestingly, the percentage of workers having a work–life balance was equal among the male and female workers at 28 percent in India, which is interestingly having the highest ratio among all the countries.

Indian women, who are dissatisfied with their job; have cited lack of opportunities and heavy workload as reasons for their dissatisfaction, whereas, inadequate pay is the basic cause for men.

Women employees have cited flexible work arrangements as one of the reason for staying with their current employers. Family responsibility is the most commonly cited reason to work in a flexible work schedule.

**Figure 1.1 WOMEN AND MANAGEMENT- GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – Share of Employees in Managerial Positions by Gender**



Source: OECD (2017), *Women and Men in OECD Countries*

Women are not well represented on the boards of major companies. Over 46% of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development(OECD) large firms have no women on the board, while only 23% have more than one woman on the board. The number of female directors are higher in the Scandinavian countries of Norway and Sweden and lower in Italy, Portugal and Japan.(Table 1.2). North American companies are among the global leaders in terms of the percentage of women in their boards, although women still represent less than 13% of board members in the United States and only 11% in Canada.

#### WOMEN IN WORK FORCE – TRENDS AND STATISTICS:

- As per the Indian census 2011, the work force participation rate of females at the National level stands at 25.51%
- Women are estimated at 38.2% of all economically active individuals.
- Women who work in the labor force, consists only 20% work in the urban areas.
- Women earn 66% of men's salary for equal work.
- India ranked 114 out of the 134 countries according to the 2014,gender-gap index.
- India has young work force and population. In the next 10 years, due to a flood of younger people entering the workforce, and more women entering the work force, India experts to add an additional 110 million people to its labor force.

In 2017, there were 123 million women in the civilian non-institutional population, and of this number 72 million, or 58.6 percent, were in the labor force—that is, classified as either employed or unemployed.

#### CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA:

Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central Government as well as state Government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need

to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

**Challenges** There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which is present in almost all societies and communities.

The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India.

It is the another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

**Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned. the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India.

The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field. **Poverty:** Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy.

Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps. **Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

### **FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

1. Overall opinion of the respondents on the dimension of Human Recourse Policies of the Organization has evoked a positive response.
2. Overall opinion of the respondents on the dimension of Opinion on Working Environment has resulted in a rational response from respondents.
3. Overall opinions of the respondents on the dimension of working relations in the organization reveals that women executives are having very unusual working environment.
4. It is also observed from the analysis that almost all the respondents of the total sample are positive and are able to manage their work and family life.
5. Women are better managers in maintaining a balance between work and life.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

1. Organization should not construct a corporate employee motivation strategy without considering the gender diversity of their work force. Recruitment of women in all hierarchy levels and representation of women at the board level should be a part of the corporate business strategy. Increasing the number of women managers can be tackled like any other management challenge i.e., by setting clear goals and targets, results and rewarding process. Targets can be set for developmental assignments for women, including specialized training, project management and high level tasks.
2. As part of the HRD initiatives and potential appraisal, organizations should consider the responsibility of sponsoring prospective women managers to specific Management Development Programmes (MDP's) and leadership development programmes organized by various institutions.
3. Organization should take initiative in creating a mentoring programme for different levels of women managers especially for Junior level managers so that they get guidance and assurance from seniors who act as mentors at times of their role ambiguity and these mentoring programmes for women managers are needed to supplement active recruitment of women for upper management positions.
4. The most important factors are the self-belief of women in handling issues by themselves, their ability to fight the prejudices of society against them, and willingness to achieve equality and break cultural and religious traditions to work in senior managerial positions. To achieve this task women executives require a number of adjustments and adaptations such as providing technological innovations to allow, policies which help to create a women-friendly work environment, training programmes, awareness initiatives to highlight the worth of women managers and stopping discrimination at the work place can prove very useful to them.
5. Unity is strength. The women managers should try to organize themselves into an association at department level; they in turn can be a sub set of a large association at organization level such association should function properly for the benefit of women executives and represent their grievances and issues related to work place. Such association can also serve as a platform for the women managers to voice out their opinions and views and it also helps in knowledge sharing.
6. The organization should identify and develop the skills and harness the potential of female employees. The Human Resource Department should conduct regular awareness programs about the new concepts and changes in the Industry. And the deserving women employees should be given opportunities to hold responsible positions to meet their self-esteem and self-actualization needs.

## Conclusion

Thus, the attainment in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well being and well being of the society as whole. Women's empowerment is not a Northern concept women all over the world, including countries in South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginning of the history. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. The greatest need of the hour is change of social attitude to women. "When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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