

Issues and challenges Faced by working women in India.

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India is known as “Mother India” for the reason that a mother looks first to the spiritual well – being for her children and India has long been the spiritual mother to all of mankind. India is the country in this vast world which has even gone to the length of worshipping her women as living images of the divine. She has been described in an ancient Sanskrit saying-“Yatr Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata (where women are respected, There lives gods)”¹ Unfortunately, Patriarchal system of society and modernization has degraded the situation and condition of women. She has always been a subject to exploitation and inequality and considered to be inferior to men.

Today, women are educated, confident and aware of their rights and privileges, and they are also getting established like male professional in every field and the traditional role of women in economic life is not acknowledged in the modern sector of the economy.² They are enhancing their status and insistently making an effort to change their long created traditional picture in our democratic system. Our present Prime minister Mr. Narendra Modi also took initiative about the empowerment of women and said that” Educating girl child is the key to women’s empowerment.³

Challenges of Women:

Despite these ,women have to face various levels of problems when they move out of their homes to work. Indian working women have to deal with the tremendous pressure for making balance between the family and their work. Complications in the workplace, security problems, gender biases, assaults and exploitations are the major challenges which they have to deal with. Some common problems of Indian women are as:-

1.Career and family obligations –

Most of Indian women are serious towards their family responsibilities, they devote their lives to take care of their family. Generally there is a lack of emotional and moral support from families towards women. As a result she withdraws from her work due to taking care of children and other family pressure. **4**

2.Gender bias issues at workplace –

Indian culture has created preconceived notions that prop up male dominance in all the important and major tasks, women are treated to be tender and weak at work place. Their potential and capabilities have always been underestimated in regard of their recruitment, salary and promotion issues. In Indian society, it is much more difficult to accept that women are also capable of working shoulder to shoulder with the men. Males are mostly given preferences and priorities in comparison to female colleagues. According to the census report of 2011, In the recruitment process, in spite of being highly qualified females are out of touch of certain jobs which require hard physical labor, outstanding intelligence and alertness. Jobs like engineers, paramilitary, geologists, administrators and such dignified jobs are generally recruited to males of equivalent qualifications.

As far as regarding promotions Indian working women have to go through a hard struggle to create a picture about their growth and development. India's basic ideology treats men being superior to women and on the ladder of success and growth numerous people are ready to pull back the female colleagues at the same working place, since male colleagues are indulged in a lot of manipulation and politics against their women colleagues. Salary issue is a great challenge before women. Due to preconceived notions of women's less capability and less hard work they are paid less in comparison to their male colleagues. Though, the equal remuneration Act 1976, states equality in remunerations yet it has seldom been exercised in Indian labor oriented places.**5**

3. Psychological and Harassment Issues –

Being a working woman in the Indian context is really a tough task. If an educated woman wants to live with independence and not to slaughter her dreams she has to maintain a balance between career and family. She gets restless and tries to increase the working power. Gradually that makes them lacking sleep and feel frustrated than they invite insomnia and depression. In such an environment (psychological torturing) they are left with two choices: either to accept the mental pressure as a part of their working life or to give up the job. They have to face other kinds of teasing like taunting, assault and abuse at their workplace. In many cases female subordinates are asked for sexual favors from their male superiors in the return of growth and promotion granted to them. Many men have the notion that working women are compromising in nature which is the foundation for such a vicious deeds. **6**

4. Socio cultural issues:

The orthodox mindset of the Indian society makes it difficult for women to balance their domestic environment with the professional field. Generally, they are expected to return home at a certain time, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of family affairs. Men who help out around their house are often the butt of jokes by their family members and male friends. All this makes life immensely stressful for working women who have little help around the house and have to do it all. It was all right for traditional women to handle all the chores as they were home makers. They have to take up a 9 to 5 job plus handle all the household chores which they handled as a homemaker. Men's role has not changed much, They still visualize females who should be in charge of the domestic deeds. So, Indian working women do not get enough respect from their male colleagues in the workplace.

According to a survey by ASSOCHAM on thousands of women professionals around 80 percent of the households expect their daughter in-law to prioritize domestic affairs over the official work. Additionally, many of them are psychologically and physically abused by their in-laws and husbands but do not complain or let others know about it, particularly if they have children.

Working women, especially those who are married and also having flourishing careers, their professional obligations often depend on the support and understanding of family members. A married man can go for official tours but his equally successful wife would face disapproval. Consequently women have to often opt-out of jobs that involve travel or settle for not being promoted as a result.

In India violence within the home is universal across religion, culture, class, and ethnicity. The abuses generally condone by social custom and considered a part and partial of marital life. They face domestic violence at the hands of their husbands, father, brother, uncle, and in-laws in their homes. Such violence may include rape, sexual abuse, verbal view, harassment, confinement, and deprivation of physical, financial, and personal resources. Sometimes emotional abuse may be more painful than physical attack because they effectively undermine women's security and self-confidence. Another serious issue is dowry, harassment by husband and in-laws. If a girl brings a large amount of dowry she is treated well in her new home otherwise she has to suffer harassment.

5.Socio economic issues:

Though, women contribute a significant role in the world of work, they support economically to the nation and their family. But in India, gender inequality persists despite a high degree of economic growth. This poor performance of India is reflected in many indicators of gender equality particularly, the low sex ratio. Femalefeticide accounts for an estimated half-a-million missing female births in India every year, lowering the female sex ratio to a dismal 914:1000 (2011). It is

the worst since independence. According to the report of UNICEF, India ranks at 115 out of 162 countries in matters of gender development.

The female work participation rate in India is only 26 per cent whereas it is 46 per cent in China. Some 34 (2011) out of every 100 women are illiterate as compared to only 13 in China. As per census of 2011, the workforce participation rate for women is 25.15% against 53.26% for males. 7

India ranks very low globally as women participation in the workforce with urban areas showing much lower figures than rural ones. Only a quarter of Indian women between the ages of 15 and 59 years are part of the workforce. India ranks 134 out of 189 countries in terms of women's participation in the workforce according to a 2013 World Bank report. These figures are really surprisingly low compared with the female literacy rate of 65.4 percent. According to the census 2011 data Uttar Pradesh and Bihar has the lowest percentage of female workers. Uttar Pradesh has the country's lowest proportion of women in the workforce at only 11%.

In most Indian families, women do not own any property on their own, and do not get a share of parental property. Due to weak enforcement of laws, women continue to have little access to land and property. Though, the Hindu personal laws of 1956 and amendment of Hindu laws in 2005 provide women rights to inheritance. Additionally married daughters, after amendment of Hindu laws in 2005 have been provided the same status as that of men. Despite all such efforts for the improvement in their status, women still feel themselves dependent on men. She is still exploited even in her economically independent state.

6.Health Challenges:

The health of Indian women is connected to their status in society. Being patriarchal society and preference for sons in India leads to biased treatment with daughters. To get a better approach on the health status of working women it is necessary to have a look at some of the selected diseases from which women frequently suffer and compare with the men and also with the prevalence rate. In

urban areas around 80 percent of women work in unorganized sectors. So, the absence of security and welfare mechanism make women vulnerable to hazardous health conditions, rape, and other forms of sexual harassment. Additionally mental and physical work pressure may leads to menstrual disorders, miscarriage, and back problems. It results in various health issues and they have to suffer from lifestyle diseases. Nowadays working women face mental stress, physical illness and lack of time etc.

7.Other Issues:

Depression – Official conflict, long working hour's depression. This may lead to mental disorders and anxiety and sometimes may addiction to unhealthy habits of drinking and smoking etc.

Obesity– Obesity may be caused due to unhealthy foods, irregular meal time, lack of workout and exercise plus continuous sitting. Obesity can be converted into serious health problems like hypertension, improper cholesterol levels and heart diseases etc. According to a book launched by Centre for Science & Environment & down to Earth on 27th Nov, 2017, "The number of overweight and obese people in India doubled between 2005 & 2015. Among individuals aged between 15 – 49 years, 20.7 percent of women & 18.6 percent of men have been found to be overweight or obese.

Insomnia – Work pressure, unstable mind and such other problems may lead to lack of sleep. Due to improper sleep, body & mind doesn't get proper rest and this creates various health issues to working women.

Back Pain – Longer sitting with improper posture and lack of exercise may result in back pain. Likewise, sudden weight gain can also lead to the risk of back pain in working women.

Cardiovascular Diseases and diabetes – Sedentary lifestyle and its related health problems such as stress and obesity increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases & diabetes in working women.

Reproductive Health issues – Infertility increases due to stress, plus unhealthy eating habits in working women. Sexual and reproductive health problems are responsible for one third of health issues for women.⁸ Maternal care has definitely improved in India since 1992 – 93, however with only 76% women accessing any prenatal care, and only 40.85% of births occurring in a health facility. Maternal morbidity & mortality are major health issues in India. It signifies not only the poor status of women but also the often appealing standards in basic health care.

In the 2011-13 periods, India's MMR was 167. As per the recently released data, the MMR during 2014-16 period stands at 136. Among states (3) best status were Kerala (46/61) 3 worst states were Assam 237 (300), Uttar Pradesh (201/285) and Rajasthan 199 (244).

Male nourishment – Malnourishment among women in India is high. Women's nutritional levels are lower than men since women face discrimination right from the time of breastfeeding to their adulthood (Pandey, 2009). As per the 2018 Global Hunger Index (GHI), the level of hunger and undernutrition worldwide fell to 20.9, down from 29.2 in 2000. As per index India was ranked 103rd out of 119 countries, that's very low.

Anemia -

Anemia is another important problem. It is a condition where the number of red blood cells in the blood is below normal for age and sex of individual. Iron deficiency is the root cause of anemia with teenage girls and women.

According to estimates 25-30% of Indian women in the reproductive age group and almost 50% in the third trimester are anemic. According to new Global Nutrition Report 2017, India placed at the bottom of the table with maximum

number of women impacted with anemia in the world. In India more than half (51%) of all women of reproductive age have anemia, whereas more than one in five (22%) of adult women are overweight.

Cancer –

In India, incidents of breast and cervical cancer are becoming increasingly significant in women. A survey done by WHO reveals that every year 132,082 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 74,118 died from the disease. In fact cervical cancer ranks as the most frequent cancer among women in India.

HIV/AIDS –

Sexual transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are also leading due to lack of gender sensitive education. In 2011 the estimated number of people living with HIV was 2.08 million. Out of these women constitute around 25% of the reported cases. Differences and power between men and women, pressure of migration, violence against women including trafficking and domestic violence are some major causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS among women.

Menopause –

During this biological process less estrogen and progesterone hormones are produced by the body and eventually their production stops. These problems create more stress among working women like influencing immune function, hormonal regulation, digestion, cardiovascular performance and nervous response (The Body Corporate Well News 2002). Working women face health risks and coerces changes during her life span. After retirement, a period of decline in status at home and society, decline in decision making power, decline in social and friendship network, feeling of uselessness and loneliness and economic and physical dependence. All these will have an adverse effect on their mental and physical health status. Aged women in India are not considered economically productive and contribution is not quantified or valued.

Educational issues-

As education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society, social reformers in India also emphasized the crucial importance of education of women to improve their status in society. In spite of all the efforts and expansion of education the vast majority of female population is still in trade in India the situation in the rural areas is much worse as compared to the urban areas. There may be two factors contributing to the low literacy rate: lack of its use in occupation and non-recognition of the value of literacy in the community. Literacy rates of India, Uttar Pradesh and Ghaziabad are shown in the table. The table reveals that the literacy rates are lower for the rural areas, particularly for women. This is applicable in case of Uttar Pradesh as well as Ghaziabad district.

Literacy Rates in 2011

India/State/District	Persons	Males	Females
India	74.4	80.9	64.60
Uttar Pradesh	67.68	77.28	57.18
Ghaziabad	78.07	85.42	69.79

Source: [https:// www.census2011.co.in](https://www.census2011.co.in)

The socio- cultural norms in India act as barriers in furthering the cause of women's and girls' education in many ways. The problem is worse in rural areas. Since the vast majority of girls especially in poor homes are required to work at a very early age in various domestic chores such as to look after their siblings, tend

cattle, contribute to the family income by their own labor, they are less likely to enter school in the first phase and more likely to drop out because of all such socio-economic pressure. When they grow up, they assume the role of a housewife and mother and are not provided any opportunity to join the stream of education.

Though educational opportunities did expand in the post-independence period, it was relatively slower among women, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. In the case of women, both secondary and higher education was practically confined to the urban middle class. There are various challenges and obstacles which come in the way of female higher education like: parental educational and economic background, lack of will among parents towards girls' higher education, inadequate transport facilities, shortage of colleges and universities in rural areas, fear of girl's molestation, urbanization and modernization. Urbanization is one of the most important factors affecting the female participation in education in general and in higher education in particular.

Political Issues:

The political participation of women also has been a question of major dilemma since long back. The Indian constitution declares that it is a fundamental right of every citizen to participate in the process of decision making but various studies refer to the fact of marginalization of women in politics, despite the proclamation of "Gender –Equality" in all legal and constitutional provisions. It is surprising to know that most of these rights are mere printed lines in our law books. In real life the picture is just the opposite. Several studies make it clear that women have a significant role in society and country, but they are subject to different violence as social, economic, mental, physical etc. **9**

Women, who form almost 50 percent of the country's population, are not even 15 percent of the total members of the national parliament. Empowerment of women is also critical for the development of India, since it will enhance both the quality and quantity of human resources available for the development. **10** It was not

better earlier in spite of all legal guarantees and outstanding women leadership including a prime minister for 16 years. Women did not have adequate representation in politics and despite women's involvement in nation building activities their effective functioning in the affairs in the governance and in politics is still dependent on the environment of their society and immediate families.

There are certain practical challenges also in the way of women participating in politics. The burden of child bearing and child rearing keeps the Indian women so engrossed in her domestic spheres that she hardly gets any time to enter public life and seek elections. Economic dependency and increasing load of work make hardly expect to take an active part in politics. The low percentage of education amongst Indian women is also responsible for less percentage in politics. In a recent study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and women, India is placed at 148th position in the representation of women in executive government. The report was launched on the sidelines of the 61th commission on the status of women. According to the report the progress in gender equality is slow in all structures of power and decision making. Power is still firmly in men's hands. The UN report also notes that India has improved its score in education, employment and per capita income of women but has not improved women's representation in parliament.

However, Government initiatives and Constitutional provisions encourage women for politics, like a bill in 2008 as a women's reservation bill or the constitutional amendment 104th which clearly states that women have 33% reservation to participation in politics. The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33.33% reservation for women also has given opportunity for the entry of a large number of socially marginalized categories such as women to enter into the domain of local institutions and their performance is very encouraging. These reservations or quota brought quantitative changes facilitated women to be represented in local governments and deserved major achievement in the

empowerment of women. Success stories of women in local governments reveal the qualitative changes that are coming forth. The Indian Constitution also guaranteed justice-social, economic and political, liberty of thought, and equality to all citizens. The Indian constitution provides equal social and political rights and promises to protect the citizens' rights, Liberty Justice, equality and fraternity. Various articles of Indian constitution have ensured against any gender gap or any discrimination. Like Article 14 of the constitution deals with equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. Similarly Article 15 provides guarantee against any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. In the same manner Article 17 deals with the abolition of untouchability and Article 39 provides adequate means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Additionally Article 40 deals with the establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions through which greater participation may be secured and Article 42 is for securing just and human conditions of work and maternity relief.¹¹

But all these provisions are not sufficient for the participation of women in politics. The increase in the number of women in legislature definitely will not bring overnight changes in the status of women. It will not solve the entire problems faced by women and bring equality immediately. However, the 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33.33% reservation for women has given opportunity for the entry of a large number of socially marginalized categories such as women to enter into the domain of local institutions and their performance is very encouraging. These reservations or quota brought quantitative changes facilitated women to be represented in local governments and deserved major achievement in the empowerment of women. Success stories of women in local governments reveal the qualitative changes that are coming forth.

Challenges faced by women in politics:

The challenge is to estimate the actual participation of women in the process of administration and politics. These may be some factors to challenge women in the political field.

Participation of envoy Candidate:

There has been evidence that due to the reservation system certain women got elected in the set up, but they worked as the mouthpiece of their male family members. So there is much possibility of on-roll women participation to be higher than what it actually exists on the ground. Awareness programs and increase in female education is now taking care of such incidences and women active participation is increasing. Still there is a need to identify proxy candidates.

Decision Making Initiatives:

The quantitative data of political participation of women at local level is available but the qualitative data on the aspects of their active participation is hard to get properly. Decision-making functionality makes them more empowered. Although the law has enabled their huge presence into the state of affairs, their valuable presence into the system is yet to be established at most of the places. The data on their awareness about their rights and its usage is still missing.

3. Socio-cultural issues:

It is our conventional belief that girls are created to require care of younger siblings and to do homely work rather than taking part outside home activity. Thus, there's division of work between men and women, which suggests home activities belong to females and outdoors home activities belong to men.. All these home activities create women busy within the home and check their involvement within the politics of the country. Culturally, there's a belief that girls are treated not to lead. All such notions concerning girls create major barriers; social perception concerning leadership ability of ladies, women's lack of self-awareness is a few

barriers that hinder the participation of women in politics. Ancient attitudes towards gender equality also influence women's advancement in political participation. Within the country girls are thought-about subordinate to men and second category members/ voters each within the family and within the society particularly in rural areas.

4. Religious factor:

Religion is another crucial source of cultural beliefs in most countries. Women are considered inferior to men in all dominant religions, and religion has been used to exclude women from social, political, or religious aspects of life around the world. In India the major religion is Hinduism, which does not allow women to lead as a head. They consider women to be men. In India this is very general among people but now the trend is changing, women began to lead political parties, Several states currently have women Chief Ministers and ministers and chairperson from long years .

5. Economic factor:

The Lack of economic resources is one of the core obstacles that prevent women from collaborating in politics in bigger numbers. There is no doubt women's participation in politics depends for the most part on their access to employment. So it is suggested that production and finances contain a direct relationship and influence on the participation of women in political establishments. Financial dependency on men is the main cause of their low participation in politics of the country.

According to the statistics on women participation in politics is gradually increasing but not desperately as we see women participation in politics from 1952 to 2014 elections in India. There is still a need for awareness among women to participate in politics enthusiastically. To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to create their own destiny and for the growth of sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is necessary. This will uplift

their personality and will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life and politics will surely resolve many problems of society.

Conclusion and suggestions:

One of the key challenges faced by working women is lack of awareness and self-confidence which hinders their active involvement and their solution in all fields. It is recommendable to bridge this gap by providing quality education to women in the country. Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated and aware. The issue of gender-based violence and provision of safety and security of women should also be addressed on a priority basis to promote gender equality in the social and political arenas. Gandhi ji also wrote "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. Women are the complement of men, and not inferior." ¹² According to the statistics on women participation in politics is gradually increasing but not desperately as we see women participation in politics from 1952 to 2014 elections in India. There is still a need for awareness among women to participate in politics enthusiastically. To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to create their own destiny and for the growth of sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is necessary. This will uplift their personality and will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life and politics will surely resolve many problems of society. To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to decide their own destiny and for the growth of genuine and sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personality but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will solve many challenges and problems of society.

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