Chapter 3

Women Employees & their problems

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Indian Women Employees & their problems

Indian pattern of women employment

The pattern of Indian women's employment has changed markedly since the 1970s. The sectors, where women have worked throughout the century, plantations, mining and manufacturing, have not been the areas of growth. Indeed in the better-paid and unionized jobs the proportion of women in the workforce has declined drastically. Women have been increasingly pushed into unregulated non-unionized jobs, with the exception of electronics and the service sector. Noting with concern that current rate of increase in the appointment of women is insufficient to achieve the objective of a 35 per cent participation rate of women in posts subject to geographical distribution by 1995.

Banking and insurance have provided new areas of opportunity for women, and nationalization has been a key factor in countering some aspects of gender discrimination. In areas such as electricity, construction, trade, transport and
communication, finance and insurance, and community services, employment in the public sector is an important factor in boosting women's employment. However recent national and international policies, which have led to the dismantling of the public sector, are affecting those limited openings. It is therefore urgent not simply to develop the means for retraining women but also for women to participate in creating alternative economic strategies.

Banking industry has been one of the major attractions to women employees because of highly paid emoluments, convenient timing and good amount of monetary and non-monetary incentives and other perks. Yet Changes in the quantity and quality of women's employment in banking can be accounted for by a number of factors operating simultaneously. There are deeper social changes taking place in the country vis-à-vis women's education and employment; changes in government policies regarding this and other sectors; changes in management policies, especially after the nationalization of banks in 1969; the effects of internationalization; and the technological changes taking place in this industry.
General Issues for Indian Employed Women:

Some of the general issues that have concerned unions and employees, especially women, in the wake of the introduction of new technology in the banking and finance sectors can be stated as:

- Prospects of job losses and declining employment levels.
- Increase in workloads.
- Pressure for flexibility.
- Changes in job contents.
- Increase in insecurity in the workplace, and loss of union power.
- Increase in the proportion of 'non-bargain able' staff (i.e. those without an automatic right to unionize) as compared to the 'bargain able' staff.
- Changes in grading and pay.
- Changes in information and control.
- Changes in the autonomy of employees.
- Changes in health and safety conditions.

The IT industry is one of the largest employers of women and has seen a significant increase in the number of women making a mark. One finds that the going is smooth from the fresher to
team leader and project leader stage. However, the percentage of women employees in IT companies gradually drops at higher levels, say for instance, at the vice-president stage. The current Dataquest-Jobs Ahead study—conducted among 1.5 lakh Indian IT professionals—found that women constitute over 19% of the total workforce at lower levels (up to three years of experience). The number drops to 6% of the senior workforce that is with more than 10 years of experience. 

Women's different decision-making style is noticeable. Whenever women have joined decision-making bodies in sufficient numbers, they have created a more collaborative atmosphere, characterized by mutual respect, independent of prevailing political differences, and sought consensus. They are focused more on solving than discussing problems. All of those characteristics would be particularly beneficial if applied to various industries.

"Although the number of women at the top is fewer, I do believe the numbers are getting better. Many women have to assign a higher priority to family over profession, although increasingly women are becoming serious about and are able to assign priority to their professions. One has to be exceptionally good to be able to break the glass ceiling, as a foreign national in
another country, or as a woman in a profession," says Padmaja Krishnan, director of marketing and business development at Xansa (an IT professional company) ²
The Dataquest-Jobs ahead survey also reveals that women in general achieve any given role and position at lower levels of experience compared to men, or more simply, they rise up the ladder faster than men do. And this trend is visible across levels in the corporate hierarchy. The survey finds that on an average, a woman team leader is just 0.4 years younger than her male counterpart and a woman program manager is 2.8 years younger than her male colleagues. ³
The relatively higher level of effort is required by women to enter the workforce in current complex scenario. Women who manage to enter workplaces by rising above societal biases are probably very strong and, therefore, do well when given the opportunity. Women have qualities like strong team playing abilities, the capability to juggle a variety of issues, flexibility and creativity in abundance. But though women are actually high performers, yet more women are not at higher levels in the hierarchy. Reason may lie in understanding the unique personal, societal and family challenges and pressures that women employees have to perform under.
Another fact regarding low rate of female employees can be the low number of women joining at lower levels. At lower-experience levels, a healthy percentage of the workforce comprises women, but their ratio drops steadily as experience levels rise. At senior levels, women constitute at a very low rate of the total workforce.

However, it is women’s personal choices and abilities to cope up with family and social pressures that decide whether they rise above the ordinary or quit the workplace prematurely. For any given job role, women tend to have lower experience than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, the oxymoron is that while women tend to rise faster up the corporate ladder, few reach the highest levels. But for anyone who doubts their innate capability, check the graph—women reach key positions far faster than men, on all counts. This statement shall be tested for women employees of Bundelkhand Region by survey findings.

**Factors responsible for low rate of employed women**

One of the most important reasons for decreased number of female employees is marriage. Marriage is perhaps the point when achieving a good work-life balance becomes paramount.
The first sharp drop in the number of women professionals is at 3+ years of experience. Once women get married or have children, the pressures of attending to the immediate family compel them to shift focus and it becomes first major impediment in their career graph.

Another important factor is lack of career orientation. It is also argued that a large number of women who start off on a positive note cease to take their careers seriously. Besides, one cannot deny that in most families, a woman's income is still considered secondary to that of her husband.

Another important reason for such drop is the demands of high responsibility may also play a role in keeping women from accepting such jobs. Women have traditionally shied away from sales responsibilities because it involves a great deal of travel. Along with that women are far less willing to relocate.

The willingness to relocate is a major factor that drives the growth of female employees.

In resolution 38/8 of Commission on the Status of women reports during its 38th session that lack of implementing Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value policy in various sectors is another problem of women employees. The Commission calls upon Governments, non-governmental
organizations and international community to take steps to give effect to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Commission at its thirty-ninth session on national experience in this regard.  

Current trend of corporate world is to work for 24 hours a day by the way of shifts, which tends to discourage the females from career development. Marriage more or less forces women to quit night shift operations and thus to work in shifts becomes even more challenging and hence the burnout gets much higher in case of female employees.

**Home manager's role of women:** which is traditional and self and society imposed part for the women also plays an important role in restricting women to come out and grow professionally because Indian male usually plays a passive role in household functions and their management.

**Male domination** in the society also creates a hurdle in career development of women as a human resource. Hostile reactions received by female employees from their male colleagues at attainment of promotional designations or other such career opportunities create barriers in their success path.

It is clear that untimely exits, either due to circumstance or personal choice, are the biggest reason why the number of
women in employment especially in Private sector declines so sharply with a rise in experience. What can HR managers do to encourage women to stay on? Companies could perhaps plan a definite strategy to curb those exits. "A good work-life balance would be most critical for encouraging women in pursuing their careers instead of abandoning them early," says Anu Sharma, V-P, HR, Quintant Corporation.5

Various other factors like job-role, work timings, time flexibility, travel and gender based discrimination also adds to lopsided growth of women employees both in number and productivity.

Motivating factors to increase women employment

Flexi-timing along with transport facilities will allow women with young children to attend to both their work and home needs. Technology can also be exploited to help women work, participate in meetings and attend to conference calls from home.

Considering the unique work demands of certain industries, it is not uncommon for companies to provide facilities such as childcare during work hours; however, the biggest challenge for
organizations is to be sensitive to family and social pressures under which women have to work.

Organizations should be sensitive to the needs of their women employees. They are wives, mothers and homemakers amongst other significant roles that they play. Various organizational policies must be drafted with these points in mind.

Finally, despite all the good work that HR department may put in to create truly women-sensitive work environments, the decision to quit still lies with the woman herself. And this is where her personal choices and ambitions come into play, something which HR departments can influence only to a limited extent.

Ultimately, it is the individual’s own home support system, ambitions and career aspirations that determine whether a woman manager is able to balance her career and family, and once she is on her way, there’s no stopping a woman employee from making mark. Various organizations now have started implementing these practices because cost benefit analysis is more on benefit side if women employees are hired at a larger number in the organization.
Official facts regarding women employment

Facts disclosed through a report issued by United Nations during May, 1997 indicate that women have not achieved equality in any of the country and it is estimated that nearly 70% percent of total poor population is of women. Report also indicates that in most of the countries, women work approximately twice the unpaid time men do and majority of women earn on average about three fourth of the pay of males for the same work, outside of agriculture sector, in both developed and developing countries and another important fact is that women employees are almost equal in number in maximum industrialized nations.6

Considering the above facts; it can be stated that conditions are not very good for female workers throughout the globe; be it the developed or developing country women still have to struggle a lot to obtain equitable status in professional field.

Asian Development Bank’s new goal of poverty reduction has focused attention on improving the status of women. In many societies, women are disproportionately burdened by poverty and systematically excluded from access to resources, essential services, and decision-making. Yet they contribute to the economy and to the fight against poverty through their
remunerative work as well as their unpaid work at home and in the community. Providing economic opportunities for poor women to improve their incomes is therefore a critical strategy for poverty reduction. Policy changes must be made and investments in women across all sectors must increase to provide women with greater access to education, primary health services, and income and employment opportunities.

In 1999, ADB's activities focused on implementing the revised Policy on Gender and Development (GAD). The GAD policy promotes gender equity through gender mainstreaming. Examples of gender mainstreaming can be found in all aspects of ADB operations: infrastructure, resettlement, agriculture, forestry and natural resource management, microfinance, and the social sectors (education, health, and water supply and sanitation). Several loan and technical assistance projects carried out or approved in 1999 address gender issues. ADB's study of rural Asia emphasizes the need to treat gender as a crosscutting issue and to support activities that improve women's access to social infrastructure, services, employment and income-earning opportunities, decision making, and community-based organizations. India's Karnataka Urban Development and Coastal Environmental Management Project

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will deal with the complex issues of gender and poverty, alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and women's lack of organization and lack of access to decision making. The Madhya Pradesh Public Resource Management Program in India will mainstream gender concerns in public enterprise reform programs by providing for equal benefits and equal access to training and retraining opportunities for women employees, and targeted assistance for poor communities to improve access to health and education. The problem of gender tracking in technical and vocational education leads to high rates of unemployment and low incomes among women. ADB provides for labor market information for potential trainees, new skills development for women, skills identification and certification by the private sector, and finance for women trainees wishing to start their own business. 8

However the situation is improving for Indian women under current economic reforms of Government of India, which is in the second phase, marked by terms Privatization, Liberalization and Globalization. The elite, educated and middle class women are gaining through exposure to western ideas on various issues like career options, jobs and role of women in economy. A high rate of Indian women is now engaged in business
enterprises as entrepreneur as well as employee at local as well as global level and result is in terms of better opportunities, profitable ideas and innovations and improved economic status, through productive measures. Ideology is changing because of active role of feminist movements; existence of female supportive institutions and growing awareness and consciousness in women herself.

Women now days tend to appear more as an individual or person instead of being mere women at work. Most recognized female prime minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi has once said, "I do not regard myself as a women. I regard myself as a person with a job." The statement supports the changing scenario of women in working environment.

So it can be stated in the light of above facts that only Government efforts in terms of plans, policies are not sufficient to increase the number of women employees in various sectors of production but non government welfare organizations and women herself will have to create a high level of awareness about their role in the economic and industrial development. Disguised employment of women in sectors like agriculture should be given a formal shape. The contribution of housewives should be evaluated and be added to economic worth. A
collective effort from Government, NGOs and organizations is required to initiate regular and frequent training programs to update the skills and caliber of women employees for their consistent growth in productive terms. Various factors contributing to problems of women employees are required to be eliminated by joint efforts of entrepreneurs, government, co-workers and women employees which can be attained through education and training.

Indian scenario is not very clear about growth and development of women employees but there is certainly a growing awareness about importance of women in national workforce and this can be realized by viewing the addition of special chapter on women development in the seventh five year plan and various women supportive policies issued and implemented by Government of India from time to time during various plans.

Education plays the basic and most vital role in converting hidden employment in the field of agriculture to other professional fields and increasing literacy rate resulting in increasing number of women in technical and professional fields like management of industrial sectors; engineering, mass media, personality grooming, communication and many more
prove the fact as well.

Women employees in Bundelkhand Region:

Bundelkhand is the region with lack of education, awareness and productive requisites; as a result tendency to initiate risky and profitable ventures is not available in usual. People are the decision takers not the risk makers. They are involved more in accepting job offers instead of initiating expanded ventures. In this region, women are in even worse conditions. Lack of literacy, lack of awareness and fewer opportunities are major factors that restrict them to have a growth-oriented career. Organizations that are already working are even showing least interest in appointing female as employees. Cultural backwardness and other traditional factors work as added barring factors in the female employment.

Conditions are slight better in case of urban areas where now people are getting aware and nuclear families are creating the demand for both hands earnings to meet the basic needs as well as to maintain a level in the society. But in rural areas where traditions like early marriage, Parda, low or nill education to girls are existing conditions are much difficult to grow as a human resource for women.
Once a man became involved in the business in any way it seems to diminish the opportunities of female employment or substantial female income, even when the business was owned and run by a woman. Usual quotations while explaining the reasons for male appointment in female owned industries are, "I employ men for muscle and women for ability." Or to explain female appointment can be "They're more reliable than men". This was an observation offered by a number of people, in various female case studies and examples were given that suggested that men often failed to turn in for work after festivals and holidays, but women invariably did. Several women at senior positions said that there were sometimes problems because "The male employees didn't like taking orders from a female boss." And in case of male entrepreneurs/administrators it is being explained that female employees are not fit for technical or time devoting jobs and thus they should be employed at lower levels only. Area like Bundelkhand where literacy is at its lowest requires a higher level of attention for its overall development in general and professional growth of women as employees in particular.
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