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Gender Equality at Workplace

ABSTRACT ::

We are entering a new era altogether, the time has widened our outlook and temperament. We are much more broad minded. Yet few areas are still needed to be cured. One of such areas is the equality of gender. Gender is the difference between men and women as perceived by the society. Men are conventionally shown in an active role in a society whereas women are portrayed more as a cosmetic element. Whatever whiff of emancipation has blown in Indian Society, has been inhaled and enjoyed by few urban women, their population belonging to the rural areas are still totally untouched by the wind of change. Still there lies a huge gulf between reality on paper and reality on ground. Yes, still miles to go when we talk about women empowerment and gender equality. Gender-based issues at work place have recently become an important topic of discussions. One of the most prevalent issues is sex-based discrimination where men are given more preference than women for doing a work. There are also other Gender based issues which arises at various points in life especially at work place. For example, sexual harassment with women at work place; marginalization and segmentation of the occupational structure in favour of men, etc. Such issues make women socially, economically, professionally and politically backward and less advanced. Such issues also highlight the role of women in a social context as well as in professional terms. These issues need to be addressed to ensure gender equality in the labour market, which require concerted efforts both at academic and policy levels. The idea is to give equal opportunities to women to be professionally well-qualified, get reputed place in an organization, treating them at par with men, giving them equal opportunities to do work and to show their talent. Women should be ensured about their safety at a work place.

We are entering a new era altogether, the time has widened our outlook and temperament. We are much more broad minded. Yet few areas are still needed to be cured. One of such areas is the equality of gender. Gender is the difference between men and women as perceived by the society. Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. Women are entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and to improved prospects for the next generation. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. We have crossed the final frontiers but we have not crossed our age old rotten mental frontiers. It is just like as it is said in Gujarati "Sanp to gaya pan lisota haju baki chhe..." even today we are living in a society where women and girls are facing the discrimination including gender based violence, economic discrimination, harmful traditional practices and reproductive health inequities. Yes, still miles to go when we talk about women empowerment and gender equality. Gender-based issues at work place have recently become an important topic of discussions.

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What is gender equality?

Measurable, equal representation of women and men. Gender equality does not imply that women

and men are the same, but that they have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment. The United Nations regards gender equality as a human right. They point out that: empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty.

Still Miles to Go ::

Women get less and promoted less often than men, and they have often been treated in a rougher and less professional manner than their male counter-parts. Despite having made big leaps toward workplace equality over the last few decades, progress has recently been slowed or stalled. Although it's been over 40 years since the idea of female empowerment first inspired a generation of women to seek independent, professional careers, they are still facing the issue of sexism in the workplace. Back in the 1970s, only two percent of executives were female. Today, around 42 % of middle management are women. Obviously, great strides have been made in the last few decades when it comes to women in the workplace. The gap between women's and men's salaries has narrowed significantly in the 1980s and 1990s. Young women fresh out of college typically get a lower starting salary than men who graduated at the same time. Women are less likely to be promoted over a male who is in contention for the same job.

The Glass Ceiling ::

The common expression which has been used to describe this situation is "the Glass Ceiling." This expression is meant to indicate a symbolic barrier in the corporate hierarchy where women are rarely allowed to pass. Women are given many excuses as to why they are passed over for promotion, including the all-too-often used reason that a woman may become pregnant and leave the company to raise a family. A recent story that made the newspapers was the story of a woman who was fired for being "Too pretty". Her male co-workers claimed she was a distraction and that her dismissal was the best thing for the company.

Heart Breaking Examples:

1. In Jun. 2010. Debrahlee Lorenzan, in America was fired from City Bank for being too pretty. Her boss Craig Fisher and one of his colleagues tried to make her less hot, allegedly, by pulling Lorenzana into an office one day and telling her she had to stop wearing turtlenecks, pencil skirts, three inch heels or "fitted" business suits. When Lorenzana brought up the matter of other females wearing way more revealing clothes, she was told those women's shapes were different from mine, and I drew too much attention."
2. Apple Computers has appointed only one female board member since 2010 and Microsoft only two. Only 31 percent of corporations have more than three female corporate officers, while the number of corporations who have no women officers at all at the top has increased by 10% in the last year. This trend of reversal in the female rise to corporate equality has set back the movement so badly that some experts predict it will take another 70 years before actual equality can be achieved.
3. Air India accused of gender discrimination against female air hostesses. Since the 1980s Air India has been faced with legal action, governmental reviews and negative media in relation to its treatment of air hostesses.

Allegations include:

- Air hostesses all being lower in seniority compared to male colleagues. This is despite the fact that some air hostesses have several years more experience working for the airline
- Women are required to undergo internal gynecological examinations prior to commencing work. There are no comparable medical requirements for male employees
- Female employees are only allowed to have two children. Male employees are not required to adhere to the rule
- Air hostesses are not allowed to wear spectacles, as they are considered to adversely affect their looks
- Female Crew members being forced to retire at 50 not 58, which is the retirement age for men

This is not uncommon treatment for many women in India who are faced with cultural and legal discrimination. The dilemma for a company operating in the country, is how to encourage an appropriate change in attitude as well as policy so that women are provided with the same

opportunities.

Situation in India ::

Unfortunately the condition in our country is even worst. However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. A major problem faced by the working women is sexual harassment at the work place. Further, women employees working in night shift are more vulnerable to such incidents. Nurses, for example, face this problem nearly every day. There is nothing that is done in hospitals to tackle and address the danger they face. Such blatant disregard of current Indian laws is one reason why sexual harassment at the workplace continues to increase. Indian women are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at work places but this doesn't apply to all working women. A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labor-oriented industries. Typically, the orthodox mindset in the Indian society makes it difficult for a working woman to balance her domestic environment with the professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to work after six o'clock. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety every day about a woman's safety while traveling. So many issues affect a working woman because she is closely protected or watched by her family and the society.

According to survey conducted by an NGO, on 1000 women professionals, around 80 per cent of the households expect their daughters-in-law to prioritize household requirements over the official work. Further, many of them are physically and psychologically abused, by their in-laws and husband but they do not complain or let others know about it, particularly if they have children.

Problems faced by Indian women at workplace ::

Bottom to top: An unfulfilled dream:

Indian women are rubbing the shoulder with men in each and every field. And today in most of the corporate have a good number of women employees at the middle level. But picture is quite disappointing when it comes to the appointing the women at the top level of the management. There are several reasons why very few women make it to the top rungs of a firm – family commitments and gender discrimination in the workplace are just a couple. When two people are considered for the same role, many a time a male employee is chosen over a woman simply because they don't have as many strings attached like pregnancy and childcare.

Discrimination in Pay:

Women in lot of Indian firms are paid 20-30% less than their male counterparts, often without valid reasons. Again, there is much debated questions against, "What if she resigns because she needs to take care of a parent or a child?" and "What if she quits because of her husband's promotion or transfer in another city?", "What if she marries and goes abroad?", "What if she wants pregnancy leave?" these are just few of the questions that run through the employer's mind. Unless women are paid the same as men for the same work, it is very difficult to retain female workforce.

Threat to Security:

Indian cities, like Delhi N.C.R has become a new IT hub of the nation. And many BPOs are set up in Noida, women workers of these BPOs are required to work for very long hours. As per the data these women are easy targets to victimize. There have been several cases of women employees of BPO organizations being raped and murdered by cab drivers in the wee hours of the morning. Security is a factor that is extremely important when a woman makes a choice about working.

Sexual Harassment: Victimization for Being a Woman:

Suggestive and double meaning statements made by bosses or peers, a careless brush of the backside, stares, conversation with sexual overtones, sending obscure messages and e-mails, making unnecessary demands. These things are not new in Indian corporate these days.

Organizations usually have a system in place for women employees to report sexual harassment and take legal action. However, there are two major issues here – inability to recognize sexual harassment in some cases, and fear of career setbacks if they report a superior. There is a pressing need to examine the aspect of sexual harassment at workplace from the perspective of emancipation of women as well as the abuse of the image in which a woman is cast. Furthermore, this definition of sexual harassment at workplaces is not restricted to women alone, as there are more and more cases where the victims are men. However, I shall be dealing only with the women's perspective. India doesn't have any legislation to deal with sexual harassment at work places at the moment. The sexual harassment of women at work place (prevention, prohibition and redressed) bill, 2006 is still under consideration. Various women's groups have been lobbying with Parliamentarians to get it passed at the earliest. However, only time will reveal as to when it shall actually come into force.

Negative temperament of Superiors:

Many a time women have a tough time dealing with immediate bosses who are male, as they generally possess the temperament that women are not serious about their career. And many times there is lack of sensitivity of the boss towards the employee's health concerns or family commitments, and assumptions about her capabilities on the basis of her gender.

Pressure and lack of support from Family:

However this is not an issue directly related to the work place but indirectly it affects women at her work. Women who must be needed to be supported by her family on the contrary are pressurized; most of the in-laws show indifference towards their work their role and their responsibility. They expect a lot from her but can't digest her expectation. Spouses and parents in law sometimes are unwilling to share responsibilities at home and with respect to childcare. This makes it all the more difficult for women to focus on work.

Insufficient Maternity Leave:

There are not many firms in India which provide sufficient maternity leave; many of these firms do not have any policy for issues related to women workers. In most of these firms women are forced to either quit or cut short their break post childbirth, depending on their financial condition. These situations raise many questions in front of us. India is on highway to become a developed actually well developed country. We are making incredible progress in all the fields. We are about to become one of the economical powers in Asia. So we have to sustain ourselves to get the most out of coming changes. These changes are knocking our doors loudly. The time has reached; we have to forget our age old temperament and traditions. We have to create a Gender equal working environment. Promoting an equality sensitive approach in human resource management is still a major challenge for companies and policymakers.

Recommendations ::

Organizations can take following steps to concrete attain gender equality by adopting below mentioned policies and practices.

1. Recruitment and Wages:

Adopting rational and fair policies which eradicate gender discrimination in areas such as recruitment, hiring, pay, and promotion. Pay the legal minimum wage and strive to pay a living wage. Ensuring fair and comparable wages, hours, and benefits for comparable work for all employees. Undertaking some concrete, verifiable actions to recruit women candidates and retain women employees from traditionally underrepresented groups and for non-traditional positions.

2. Elimination of all forms of discrimination:

All the discriminations based on attributes such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or cultural stereotypes in all work-related activities or privileges, including wages, hours, benefits, job access, and working conditions. Even the discrimination based on marital, parental, reproductive, or health status (including HIV/AIDS) in all employment or promotion decisions should be prohibited.

3. Support and Motivation for Career Development:

A higher level of management should provide a fair amount of support and motivation to women employees and should take their care objectives seriously. They should adopt policies that enable work-life balance and support educational, career, and vocational development of every employee without any discrimination. Undertaking concrete, verifiable actions to make professional and private life more balanced by implementing and promoting a variety of flexible work options, including workforce exit and re-entry opportunities, and support women returning to positions of equal pay and status. Promote the use of family leave, dependent care, and wellness programs. Allow time-off from work for employees seeking medical care or treatment, for themselves or their dependents, including family planning and reproductive health care. Supporting access to childcare either by providing childcare services, preferably on-site, or referrals. Providing equal opportunities and access for women to education, including literacy, vocational, and information technology training. Provide professional development opportunities that include formal or informal networking, client development activities, and mentoring programs for women at all levels, including women working in non-traditional fields.

4. Providing Safety and Freedom from Violence:

Special committees should be made to work for Health, safety and well being of the female workers. Especially in the sectors like BPOs and Hospitals where female employees are asked to work late night. One should provide a body within the organization to ensure the safety of female employees and vendors in the workplace, including travel to and from the workplace and on company-related business, and ensure the safety of vendors in the workplace. Providing and promoting policies and programs addressing domestic violence. Working with view to eliminate and disclose unsafe working conditions by providing protection from exposure to hazardous or toxic chemicals in the workplace, particularly when those substances have known or suspected adverse effects on the health of women, including reproductive health.

5. Equal and Fair Chances for Enlightenment and Upliftment:

Women should be given equal chance to work at the top level of the management. Policies must ensure equitable participation in management and governance. Establish policies and undertake proactive efforts to recruit and appoint women to managerial positions and to the corporate board of directors. Establish policies and undertake proactive efforts to assure participation by women in decision-making and governance at all levels and in all areas of the business, including budgetary decision-making. Include improving gender equality as a factor in performance measures and provide resources to support gender initiatives.

6. Stress management Training:

There must be some programs at least twice in quarterly session for the stress management for all the workers, specially keeping the women workers in mind. Encourage philanthropic foundations associated with the organization to promote gender equality through their grant-making, programmatic initiatives, and investments. Encourage women and girls to enter non-traditional fields by providing accessible career information and training programs designed specifically for them. Respect female employees' rights to participate in legal, civic, and political affairs—including time off to vote—without interference or repercussions in the workplace.

7. Eradicating Sexual Harassment:

Sexual harassment must be removed to create harmonious and democratic working environment. There must be a special Body to deal with and inquire the cases of sexual harassment. There is dire need of strict code of conduct and discipline amongst the co-workers dealing with female counter parts. Exercise proactive leadership to protect women from sexual harassment, violence, mutilation, intimidation, retaliation, or other denial of their basic human rights by host governments or non-governmental actors and refuse to tolerate situations where cultural differences or customs are used to deny the basic human rights of women and girls.

8. Business, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices:

Maintain ethical marketing standards by respecting the dignity of women in all sales, promotional, and advertising materials. Minimize or eliminate any form of gender or sexual exploitation in marketing and advertising campaigns. Encourage and support women's entrepreneurship. Seek business relationships with women-owned businesses and vendors, including micro-enterprises, and work with them to arrange fair credit and lending terms. Clearly forbid business-related activities that condone, support, or otherwise participate in trafficking, including labor or sexual exploitation. Ensure that these Principles are observed not only with respect to employees, but also business partners such as independent contractors, sub-contractors, home-based workers, vendors, and suppliers. Take these Principles into consideration in product and service development and major business decisions, such as mergers, acquisitions, joint venture

partnerships, and financing.

9. **Civic and Community Management**

Encourage philanthropic foundations associated with the organization to promote gender equality through their grant-making, programmatic initiatives, and investments. Encourage women and girls to enter non-traditional fields by providing accessible career information and training programs designed specifically for them. Respect female employees' rights to participate in legal, civic, and political affairs—including time off to vote—without interference or repercussions in the workplace. Respect freedom of association among all employees. Work with governments and communities where the organization does business to eliminate gender-based discrimination and improve educational and other opportunities for women and girls in those communities, including support for women's community groups working for the advancement of women. Exercise proactive leadership to protect women from sexual harassment, violence, mutilation, intimidation, retaliation, or other denial of their basic human rights by host governments or non-governmental actors and refuse to tolerate situations where cultural differences or customs are used to deny the basic human rights of women and girls.

10. **Leadership, Transparency and Accountability:**

Commit to gender equality through a CEO statement or comparably prominent means and prominently display the commitment in the workplace and/or make it available to all employees in a readily accessible form. Establish benchmarks to measure and monitor progress toward gender equality and report results publicly. Develop and implement company policies, training, and internal reporting processes to ensure implementation of gender equality throughout the organization and conduct periodic self-evaluations through data collection and analysis, audits, public disclosure, and reporting. Establish a clear, unbiased, non-retaliatory grievance policy allowing employees to comment or complain about their treatment in the workplace. Engage in constructive dialogue with stakeholder groups, including employees, non-governmental organizations, business associations, investors, customers, and the media on progress in implementing the organization's commitment to gender equality. Be transparent in the implementation of this commitment and promote endorsement and implementation by affiliates, vendors, suppliers, customers, and others with whom the organization does business.

Some Do's for Government to Solve Gender Inequality:

Every problem has its own solution elsewhere or what ever the problem is? Like this phenomenon this problems has many measures out of which some of the simple one are stated below (except legislative and judicial Solutions).

1. Changes at District level mechanism:

A clear cut administrative should be made available at the district level for monitoring and reviewing the incidence of inequality against women. This district level machinery headed by District Magistrate should consist of representatives of police, prosecution machinery, judiciary and the representatives of prominent individuals of women's organizations in the Districts. This committee should review progress of investigation and prosecution. At least one special cell should be created at the district level for ensuring better registration and progress of investigation and monitoring of crimes against gender equality. This special cell should network with community groups and women's organizations and help to create an atmosphere in which people would feel encouraged to freely report the cases of gender injustice. At present, most, non-reporting of the cases is due to lack of confidence in enforcement machinery.

2. Changes at State level Mechanism:

Similarly, like District level mechanism there should be State level machinery at the State level in which there should be special entry for those cases which needs prompt actions. This institution will make a full control over the district level machinery. So that there should nit be any corruption or fraud with innocent persons.

3. Sensitization of Criminal Justice system:

The police officers, prosecutors, and judges at all levels of hierarchy need to be exposed to the gender equality education which would enlighten them on existing assumptions, myths and stereotypes of women and how these can interfere with fair and equitable administration of justice. Judicial system should comprise of all types of officers i.e. from judiciary i.e. judges, police officers and which should take immediate action in serious cases.

Family Law:

Another of wrong is family law also. In this accused can be punished under Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Dowry Prohibition Act, 1987 other laws relating to family disputes. The suit/ case can be filed for domestic violence or any other household wrong.

Gender equality is the need of the hour I like to quote here Dr. Justice A.S Anand -
 "Fight for gender equality is not a fight against men. It is a fight against traditions that have chained them – a fight against attitudes that are ingrained in the society – it is a fight against system – a fight against proverbial laxshman Rekha which is different for men and different for women. The society must rise to the occasion. It must recognize & accept fact that men and women are equal partners in life. They are individual who have their own identity".

I like to conclude here with these lines of mine indicating the earnest desire of our companions, partners. The desire of women for resetting and reforming this unequal world for them.

*We are Women, not things to woe the men
 We serve you but we are not your servant
 We are your partners but not a secondary part
 We are your companions not a burden on you
 We need respect not a sympathy drench in Hypocrisy
 We want to move together, don't pull our legs
 We want to walk side by side, so better give us side
 We want fresh breath, don't try to suffocate us
 These lines clear it all and now it is up to us how we manage*

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