

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS

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Abstract: Nowadays we see many TV commercials which show women as independent and empowered, similarly “All I need is a chance”; a beautiful commercial by Oriflame (a cosmetic brand) featuring Bollywood actress Kalki Koechlin gives a powerful message to all the women out there. But even in such optimistic plus pleasing portrayals we find some spine chilling and alarming messages related to who exactly can be empowered. Half of India’s population consist of women and yet females are deprived of access to opportunities and resources in comparison to their male counterparts not only domestically but also professionally. Yes, workplace discrimination with women in Modern India is still a reality. Female employment discrimination is a real issue that grips modern India and our search to establish an equal society must pick up a pace. Discrimination at workplace is stressful and detrimental. Despite of so many laws relating to workplace discrimination, safer work environment and equal opportunity is still a myth. This study makes an attempt to discuss women at workplace, anti-discrimination laws in India (their ineffectiveness and loopholes), and tries to construct an affirmative action by giving possible suggestions to overcome the problem stated. We will also be discussing Shashi Tharoor’s Anti-Discrimination and Equality Bill, 2016 which is yet to be passed in Rajya Sabha.

IndexTerms: Women, workplace environment, workplace discrimination, anti-discrimination, laws, equality

I. INTRODUCTION

Workplace Discrimination

Discrimination is the wrongful act that distinguishes people illicitly not on the basis of their individual merit, but on the basis of prejudice or some other immoral attitude.

Workplace Discrimination is a form of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity by employers or colleagues at the workplace.

Discrimination at workplace involves three basic elements:

1. It is against one or more employees and is not based on morally recognized qualifications.
2. The decision of discrimination derives solely from sexual and racial prejudice, or some other kind of immoral attitude against a particular group of employees.
3. It has a negative impact on the interests of the employees against whom discrimination is done during hiring, promotion, compensation, job allotment or termination of a particular employee.

Discrimination can take different forms in workplace like discrimination on the basis of

- Age
- Sex
- Qualification
- Disability
- Pregnancy
- National Origin
- Race/Colour
- Religion
- Sexual Harassment
- Equal Pay or Compensation
- Place of origin
- Caste
- Ethnicity

In a survey conducted by TeamLease, 48 % of the total respondents (Indians) have faced some kind of discrimination at the workplace.

Women: A Victim of Workplace Discrimination

There is existence of a persistence gap between men and women not only in domestic but also in professional spheres of life and this is one of the harsh realities of 21st century. Male and female are two wheel of a same cart. Women of India have faced discrimination through the ages and continued to face the same even today in different forms. Both men and women have their equal share of human right. But still women are deprived of their rights and freedom. They are not only distinguished on the basis

of their sex and face sexual harassment but also on the basis of their age, race, caste, creed, colour, ethnicity, etc. In this highly male dominated society, women are unable to understand their rights which are not only detrimental and stressful for women but also for the growth of country as a whole. Women life is full of complications. They have come a long way but still are deprived of proper working environment as compared to their male counterparts and are treated inferior in different walks of life.

Ivanka Trump too discussed women in the work place at India Summit and said that, Today, many women are choosing female entrepreneurship as their career as traditional workplaces haven't worked for them and they are still deprived of opportunities and resources in Modern India. Types of discrimination women face at their workplaces can be:

- a) **Hostile environment- Sexual Harassment-** Workplace discrimination has been a perennial problem for both private and public sector work environment in India. Section 2(n) of the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act defines the term 'Sexual Harassment'. According to this section, sexual harassment includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely:
- Physical contact and advances
 - Demand or request for sexual favours
 - Making sexually coloured remarks
 - Showing pornography
 - Any other unwelcome, verbal or non verbal conduct of sexual nature

With the number of increasing cases of sexual harassment at workplace, women are continuously subjected to discrimination in one form or the other; little did they know what women go through when her dignity and personal space is violated at workplace.

- b) **Women and Age Discrimination-** many women face age discrimination at workplace. They feel that only recourse is to sue their employers but they have a frightening road ahead if they choose to do so. Such steps can create barriers for senior women who are seeking to change jobs or re-enter the workplace. It is difficult for older women to find jobs and face discrimination on many grounds. Past research shows that older women suffer age discrimination more than older men. There is an urgent need for workplaces that gives equal and fair opportunities for women of all ages.
- c) **Gender discrimination- Unequal pay-** When females are paid less than their male counterparts based on their gender, it is a form of Gender discrimination and it is illegal. Sex discrimination is a global concern and does not receive the appropriate attention that it deserves. According to World Bank, in 2014, the total participation of women in the labour force was only 24.2%. The shocking reality is that there has been a 23% decline in the women labour force participation in India over the last 25 years. In a country where women goddesses are worshiped and where women constitutes almost half of the total population, these numbers present a challenge that we as a society must aim to overcome.
- d) **Women and Caste discrimination-** A patriarchal shadow always hang over the lives of women be at home or workplace. Women are also a victim of caste discrimination and the heaviest burden of discrimination is for women who are Dalits or schedule castes. They experience multiple level of discrimination which is totally inhumane. According to a study by UN, the human rights of Dalit women are violated in peculiar and extreme forms.
- e) **Women and Colour discrimination-** A dark skinned woman is often the target of much discrimination in a world that is smitten with fair skin, right from her birth to later life. Sometimes it gives us a feeling that our skin colour will finally decide our future. As reported by Reuters, three women engineers sued Uber for an unequal pay, race, and gender discrimination. They claimed that company pays women and people of colour less and doesn't give them promotion as compared to men, whites and Asians.
- f) **Discrimination against pregnant women-** Discrimination on the basis of pregnancy is a type of job discrimination that occurs when pregnant women are fired, not hired or face any discrimination against, due to their pregnancy. It involves unfavourable treatment against women during her pregnancy, child birth or a medical condition related to her pregnancy. Past research reveals that pregnant woman applicants are highly subjected to workplace discrimination and face negative judgements. Despite of so many legal protections pregnancy discrimination at workplace is still widespread.
- g) **Discrimination against women with children-** past research shows that mothers face more discrimination in the workplace than fathers and more than people without children. Even in these modern times there is still a lot of cultural stigma attached to working mothers. Mothers are discriminated in workplace in various ways like no proper facilities are given to pump breast milk, lewd comments about whether they'd rather be home with their children or the comments on expectation that pregnant women simply won't come back to the workplace after having children.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know the concept and types of workplace discrimination against women in India.
- To understand the extent of victimisation of women due to workplace discrimination or employment discrimination.
- To know the dangers attached to employment discrimination.
- To study different forms of discrimination that women face at workplace.
- To know the effectiveness and loopholes of Anti-discrimination laws in India focussing on Anti-Discrimination & Equality Bill, 2016 proposed by MP Shashi Tharoor.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature and tries to assess the problems faced by women at workplaces. The research tool used for analysing the data which amassed from different sources for current study will be content analysis and the research method will be descriptive research. We will be taking into consideration qualitative aspects for the research study.

Data Collection

Secondary Data:

Secondary sources of data used are books, journals, newspapers, government reports & publications, acts, bills, search engines, company websites, scholarly articles, research papers and other academic publications.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are discriminated since the beginning of time. Women have come a long way and every single time they proved their mettle. But discrimination against them still exists even in the most progressive societies. Discrimination against them is deeply rooted into the societies and people have grown accustomed to it and this acceptance makes change even more challenging task. Despite so many legal protections, discrimination against women in the workplace still persists in India. According to a recent policy by Opportunity Now, 1/5th of the total women surveyed said that their careers stalled due to discrimination of work where there managers failed to give them promotion and training opportunities.

B. Ghosh & S.K. Mukhopadhyay (1984) studied that there has been a drastic decline in number of female workers and their work participation rates. They explained the situation by concluding that male enjoys a dominant position at the workplace, overall employment is less and sex ratio of females is really low in the population.

Vibhuti Patel (2002) discussed that workplace discrimination and harassment has remained one of the central problems of the women's movement in India since the early 80's.

Vibhuti Patel (2005) studied sexual harassment at workplace and stated it as a universal problem and infringement of the fundamental rights of woman as per the constitution of India. She suggested that both a top-down initiative by the state and employers and initiatives by civil society from citizen's groups, trade unions and women organizations.

Ramakrishnan (2008) in his study, states that every day in some part of our world, women are mistreated. They are being raped and sexually harassed. The most basic human right that is "Right not to be violated" is violated many a times when crimes are committed against woman.

C.P. Chandra Shekhar & J. Ghosh (2007) studied the changing pattern of women's pay at workplaces in Urban India. They conducted an analysis of female employment in Urban India and found that there has been a sharp decrease in the women employment in urban areas. They observed a decline in casual employment of urban women and increase in self-employment. They also stated a disturbing fact of increasing women employment as domestic servants across India.

B.Unnikrishnam, T.Rekha, Ganesh Kumar, B.Rashmi, P.Mithra & B.Sanjeev (2010): Their study depicts the demographic data of the respondents and the harassment faced by them in their respective work places. It was observed that the younger lot faced more harassment as compared to older one. They found that sales girl, followed by nurses faced more harassment as compared to school teachers and bank employers. They also found that respondents with less or no experience faced more harassment at workplaces as compared to experienced employees.

Shalmoli Bhattacharya (2015) studied the evolution of laws and various acts on discrimination and harassment of women at workplace. She suggested that in order to act wisely, companies must first understand the whole issue of sexual harassment and should invest considerable time and investment towards this important issue.

Sree Krishna Bharadwaj H (2015) stated that women have been discriminated in India from time to time and the main reason behind is the existence of anti-discrimination laws only in the books and not in practice. Government has failed tremendously in implementation of legislations which is very necessary to remove discrimination from the society and workplaces. He suggested that proper implementation of the laws in actual sense is very much necessary to remove the discrimination in the society.

Pereira & Rodrigues (2014): Study states that law relating to workplace discrimination in India is facing infancy and is prone to many flaws and loopholes. She suggests that extensive research and debating is required to fill the loopholes of current laws. There is a need to implement new strict laws. Fast track courts must be set up in order to avoid further harassment of individuals at workplaces.

Krupa R. Trivedi (2015) studied gender discrimination at workplace. According to her workplace discrimination is a common and a constant problem everywhere in our country. Constitution of India does talk about discrimination but it is very limited in scope and extends only to state and public institutions. She suggests that proper framework with constructive planning is very essential at this point of time to make women free from workplace discrimination. According to her, Human Resource Department and personnel selecting the employees must be proactive in their approach and must prevent gender equality. Anti-discrimination cell must be created in the organizations so that cases of discrimination can be reported immediately and anonymously. She also believes that syllabus at primary school level should include success stories of strong women like Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi etc, so that students can get inspired and respect every gender from the young age.

Bhagwati Prasad Chaudhary (2016) studied violence against women and sexual harassment at workplaces. She says that organizational culture plays a vital role to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of discriminations at workplace. She suggested that top level management must take proper initiatives to have a better environment at workplace. This can be done by collective efforts of all the employees and members at the workplace.

According to Teamlease Study (2016), in India more than 72% of females are still a victim of gender bias at workplace. Women are severely underrepresented at workplaces. Teamlease presented all the employment trends in its report which aimed at stirring an appropriate public awareness about workplace discrimination and equal opportunity at workplaces.

Bhat & Deshpande (2017) revealed that sexual harassment is a social evil which is growing with great pace. It is observed that cases of sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination against women is increasing day by day. Therefore a good mechanism that would better halt the situation and reduce the number of such incidents is need of an hour. They discussed the prominent causes of sexual harassment against women at workplace and it includes male domination, inferior job position, aggressive masculine trait of male gender, misperception about the friendly nature of women, higher academic profile and lesser job opportunity. She recommended that every organization must train its employees about this grave issue and make clear its legal implications. Seminars and legal awareness programmes should be organized in the organizations from time to time. Internal complaints committee can be established to deal with grievances properly.

Anagha Sarpotdar (2017) studied sexual harassment at the workplace comparing public and private sector. She focused on implementation of Sexual harassment Act of women at workplace in the private sector. Even after years of implementation of the act called as Sexual harassment of women at workplace act, 2013, sexual harassment of women still persists as a critical issue faced by the private sector undertakings. She explained that this scenario is due to short comings on the part of employers to deal with such issues. Government of India is taking active steps for the betterment of the society and implementation of Act of 2013 in government offices but there are severe short comings in its execution in the private sector.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS IN INDIA

Right to work is specified and classified as an essential Human Right under Article 232 and 243 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights.

Article 15 and 16 of the constitution of India states social safeguard measures for all citizens of India. Article 15 of the constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 16 makes equal opportunity mandatory in matter of public employment. Many aspects of women equality are mentioned in different constitutional laws but anti-discrimination code is still missing.

Some of the existing laws to deal with violence against women are:

a) The Equal Remuneration Act 1976

The Equal Remuneration Act 1976 also known as ERA is aimed at preventing sex discrimination in the workplace. ERA states that males and females must be paid equally for similar work and also no discrimination are made during recruitment for similar work. Employees cannot claim compensation under the ERA but can claim the amount of wages they are being deprived off.

b) The Maternity Benefit Act 1961

The Maternity Benefit Act 1961 aimed at providing maternity benefit to pregnant women, providing paid maternity leave to women employees, prohibition on termination of employment during pregnancy of a woman employee, prohibition on deduction of wages, penalty and punishment for people contravening the provisions under the act and related aspects.

c) The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 is a very progressive law which aims at protecting disabled employees from discrimination in Government employment. The RPD Act includes private companies too hence every establishment (public or private) is required to formulate an 'Equal Opportunity Policy. RPD Act defines penalty and punishment for those who contravenes provisions of the act.

d) The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013

Sexual harassment is one of the most atrocious forms of discrimination against women. In recognition of this, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act 2013 ("PoSH Act") empowers victim to claim the compensation of atrocities done to them. The compensatory sum is deducted from the wages of the employer and provided to the victim. This Act is fully applicable to private sector organisations and is currently the only law in India which allow a victim of discrimination in the workplace to avail compensation.

e) Other Legislations

- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.
- Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
- Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- Factories Act, 1948.
- Industrial Disputes Act 1947

Anti-Discrimination law still a myth?

There is no umbrella legislation to address and protect the victims of workplace discrimination. Some laws stated above deals with some specific issues related to workplace discrimination but still so many issues remain untouched with no proper legislation and relief in case of any discriminatory practice. The lack of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law in our country is really disadvantageous for the victims of workplace discrimination. Constitution of India does have certain provisions against discrimination and construction of affirmative action but they are very limited in scope i.e. they apply only to public sector.

Indian constitution ensures fundamental rights to women but its scope and jurisdiction just covers state or public institutions. Their provision doesn't stretch out to the private sector organizations. There is no general Anti-Discrimination Policy in India; not even a statutory meaning of discrimination is mentioned. Therefore private sector organisations get an unconstrained reign when it comes to discrimination. Moreover, the constitution of India remains silent on the multitude of categories because of which people are discriminated. For instance, Article 15 of the constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. This doesn't include many aspects on which discrimination can be practiced at a workplace like age, colour, pregnant women, mothers at work, HIV Positive people, LGBT (Lesbians, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender) community, etc. India's way to deal with overall equality has just been so in effective in alleviating the basic issues that encourage

discrimination in employment. The work discrimination framework remains highly affected because of the legislature's inability to address the issue in a better way.

Anti-Discrimination & Equality Bill, 2016 By Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Member Of Parliament

Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Congress party introduced "Anti-Discrimination & Equality Bill, 2016" in Lok Sabha. This bill was advised and drafted by Tarunabh Khaitan who is an Associate Professor in Law at the University of Oxford. He discussed the bill with various activists, lawyers, politicians, academicians across India. According to him, the bill is an effort by Tharoor and Khaitan to realize Dr. Ambedkar's vision of an India free of any sort of unfair practices of discrimination. It is a private member's bill. Private member bill is a bill which is introduced by a person who is a Member of Parliament but not the member of Cabinet (executive). This bill may get noticed by the media but given the history of private member bills, there is a possibility of non-acceptance by the government. But urgency of the issue of discrimination that is faced by millions of Indians at each and every spheres of their lives must be acknowledged by the government and must take ownership of the bill. Government can send this bill to the standing committee of parliament for scrutiny in the light of wide public consultation.

The bill seeks to establish a "Central Equality Commission" which will try to deal with the complex legislation like this one. As ordinary civil courts of India does not have the required capacity in terms of personnel, training and time to deal with this issue and legislation on an urgent basis. Khaitan while drafting the bill have personally paid close attention to the nature, design, independence, composition and costs of equality commission established under this bill. The qualifications required to be the member of equality commission will make it hard for the bureaucrats to be appointed for this commission. The commission will be independent of the government and will have real powers with great amount of accountability. Commission was designed after carefully studying the successes and failures of the existing commissions. Chairpersons of many of these existing commissions will act as ex-officio members of the Equality Commission established under the bill, so that they can also share their part of learning and experiences with the new body.

This bill aims at giving "symmetric protection" to the victims i.e. protecting majorities and minorities at the same time. One of the key features of the bill is that discrimination is seen as a civil offence rather than a criminal offence. The focus of the bill is on compensation and redressal of grievances for the victim, rather than punishment for the discriminator. There are several other provisions for aggravated discrimination where a Magistrate would be approached for a protection order. It is the first bill of its kind to provide compensation to victims who are being discriminated, segregated or boycotted. The amount of damages will be twice the monthly salary of a Member of Parliament or Rupees 1 lakh, whichever is higher. In case of aggravated discrimination provision of penalty is different i.e. annual salary of the President of India or Rupees 15 lakhs, whichever is higher.

The constitution of India does have certain provisions prohibiting discrimination and mandating affirmative action but they only apply to public sector. Private sector is suffering a lot when it comes to discrimination against women on various grounds at workplaces. This is mainly due to inadequate implementation of the existing laws.

Mr. Shashi Tharoor tried to bring in a remedy to this terrible state of affairs by bringing in Anti-discrimination and equality bill, 2016 which is a comprehensive discrimination law. It will be known as Anti-discrimination and Equality Act, 2016 if it managed to get the required votes at Lok Sabha.

The bill significantly recognizes different categories that will be protected from discrimination and mistreatment on the basis of prejudice under the law. This bill provides symmetric protection to all individuals who were earlier left defenceless. It also provides strong structure and a good mechanism to redress the grievances of the people being a victim of discrimination.

At present, discriminating attitudes that are based on marital status, sexual orientation, disability, caste affiliation, religion or food preferences do not come within the scope of present law. Existing law does not cover situations where discrimination is practised on various grounds in the private sector organizations, clubs, societies, NGOs, educational institutions, hospitals, and panchayats.

Under the bill, a "protected characteristic" in relation to citizen of India means:

- Any caste, race, sexual orientation, religion and belief, tribe, ethnicity, descent, sex, gender identity, pregnancy, disability, linguistic identity, HIV status, nationality, marital status, food preferences, skin tone, place of residence, place of birth or age or
- Any other personal characteristic which is
 - a) Outside the person's control and also out of his or her fundamental choice
 - b) Or, any group that is suffering or is in danger of suffering any widespread disadvantage in the workplace or

- A combination of any of the above.

The bill defines the term “workplace” and is very wider in scope but it is not limited to,

- (a) Any public sector undertaking, organization, department, undertaking, enterprise, establishment, institution, office, branch or unit which is controlled or wholly or substantially financed by money or the funds provided either directly or indirectly by the Central or State Government, local authority, Government company, corporation or a co-operative society, or
- (b) Any private sector organization, enterprise, venture, establishment, undertaking society, etc.
- (c) Any hospitals or nursing homes; or
- (d) Sports institutes, stadiums, sports complexes or competitions or games venue, whether residential or not and used for training, sports
- (e) Any place that is visited by the employee during the time or continuance of his/her employment also including the transportation provided by the employer for visiting such place during that time.

Anti- discrimination and Equality (ADE) Bill, 2016 as a tool for positive change

- It accounts for intersectionality, also recognizes gender identities and sexualities.
- It tries to provide symmetric protection to persons (women) across the spectrum
- It considers discrimination as a civil offence and hence focuses on compensation to the aggrieved person rather than simply on prosecution.
- Bill tries to cover all forms of discrimination under one umbrella law. This will be really beneficial for the persons who were defenceless, earlier.
- It establishes an equality commission which is designed in such a way that it tries to avoid bureaucracy.
- It covers majorities as well as minorities’ communities.
- It tries to cover both public and private sector workplaces which is needed very urgently.
- This bill shows us the atrocities done to the citizens of the country and how urgently we need to make India a discrimination free nation not only legally but in our every day practices.

Loopholes of the Bill

- It is a private member’s bill and given the history there is a possibility of non-acceptance.
- Establishing of equality commission to tackle discrimination will only add up one more structure to the existing bureaucratic structures i.e. it will only add up to the proliferation of structures and commissions in the country.

We witness cases of discrimination in all spheres of our economic, social and political life. Women at workplace are not only a victim of sexual harassment but also many other forms of discrimination like racial discrimination, caste discrimination, gender discrimination on grounds of unequal pay that pay parity gap between the salary of male and female at workplaces, age discrimination (ageism), colour discrimination, pregnancy discrimination, discrimination against working mothers, etc. There is an urgent need of a comprehensive law that is neutral and free from bias to protect the women from all the atrocities done to them at workplaces (both public and private) and let them work with dignity and respect.

Tharoor’s bill is one of a kind and his efforts must be appreciated by country for thinking of making India a discrimination free country. Shashi Tharoor and Tarunabh Khaitan are hoping that one fine day Lok Sabha will pass their bill and send it for further scrutiny and public consultation. But the fate of the bill is still unclear being the private member’s bill.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Unfavourable treatment at workplace on different grounds against women is not only unethical but also detrimental to women’s health. India’s way to deal with the matter of substantive equity has been quite ineffective and in modern India female employment discrimination is still a bitter reality. Legislature is unable to make a well defined move to address discrimination and this inability has further exacerbated the issue. Current framework includes few laws which address different types of discrimination but not all. There is a dire need of a consolidated and comprehensive anti-discrimination code that addresses all forms of discrimination in its different structures and against a full scope of disadvantaged sections of the society. Shashi Tharoor’s bill as explained earlier is one of a kind and it requires proper consideration.

Recently, Women and Child Development Minister Shrimati Maneka Gandhi inaugurated an online system of complaint management for working women in both public and private sectors and enabled them to lodge complaints of Sexual harassment at workplace. It has been brought to ensure the effective execution and implementation of the SH Act, 2013. This historic step of government to receive such complaints online is worth the praise but other types of discrimination at workplaces also deserve equal attention.

Employers also have a positive duty to eliminate all types of discrimination, harassment and victimisation at workplace. There must be an anti-discrimination policy at workplace that outlines company's commitment to equality and prescribes a mechanism for redressal of complaints. Workers should be educated about discrimination and their complaints must be dealt promptly and confidentially. Employers must review policy to ensure its effectiveness from time to time.

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