

# **FEMALE LABOR FORCE IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We know that India is always been a country in which the stigma of “Gender Discrimination” is very high. In day to day life we can clearly see that women face lot of difficulties and they have to fight for every right. The discrimination is very much on the basis of caste, color, education, sex, etc. It is very hard to find perfect equality in the human society. It does not mean male and female should be made equal in all aspects and all the time, but their responsibilities, rights should be equal in every aspect be it at workplace, in education field, political activities etc. If these things will be considered by the society then this problem of gender discrimination can be reduced to a minimum extent. Women should be given equal chance to show their skills. Therefore, I have done my research mainly on one factor which is female labor force in India and how females face lot of challenges and issues. For better understanding I have also covered other points like challenges, legal provisions, and development at global level, government schemes etc with the help of some case laws.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past few years the percentage of female labor force has been declining. In 2006 the participation of females was 34 % but in today’s time in 2020 it has come down to the level of 24% which is not a good sign for a growing economy like us. This recent major decline in female labor force participation i.e. (FLFP) rate in India has been a very crucial matter of debate as it is related with the Growth rate of a country and its Gross Domestic Product. Indian economy is a mixed economy and because of that private sector and government sector play equal role in the growth process. In the past decade the agriculture sector has major contribution to the economy but in recent times the growth of public sector also increased and this also plays a very crucial role. So, we can analyze that while the rate of growth has increased in the past time but the participation of women labor force has decreased.

There are many factors which are particular to females only as a consequence of which female cannot actively participate in the development activities in comparison to the male labor force. Women's in rural areas are mostly engaged in agricultural activities in comparison to the urban area females and that is why rural area women's are limited to that area only but the rural area women's have an upper-hand because their participation is more but the problem here is that they are not getting paid for the work they have done.

Firstly; India is a country in which different types of culture, trends, communities, caste system exist and these are the factors declining rate of female labor force. Secondly; in India there is this mentality that women are made for doing household work only. Basically Indian economy is a care - economy in which women do all the household work like taking care of child, do the domestic work along with their jobs that is why many females are unable to do overtime work and that is the reason why many companies, factories do not appoint a large number of female labor force. Thirdly; population is also a factor because India's population rate is higher and that is the reasons why we have the problem of unemployment arise.

### **ISSUES FACED BY FEMALES**

- **Technological Development**– If a normal woman wants to be technically advanced than she must have her pockets full with the currency. We know that in today's era many different kinds of technology are coming and to operate them high level knowledge is required. So, industrialization is also increasing in India and because of that in every sector, be it in a company or in a job special skilled employees and workers is required. Now, the problem here is that to operate that high quality machines skilled labor is required so that peacefully work can go and production will increase in a short span of time but in India many people don't know about the high- tech machines because they do not have the knowledge of these type of machines and the reason of the lack of knowledge is education. Yes, education is the primary reason of this cause because the illiteracy rate in India of female is much more than that of male. Again the problem of discrimination arises. So, women do not have the proper knowledge and they do not much about the technology they are not able to do the work and that is why they are afraid to do the job. They are not participating in these types of activities.
- **Training**- This thing is also a barrier because training opportunities is very less in number for the female labor force and the available one are very expensive. Many of the time they are

not eligible for the training part as it requires money and strength and because of this barrier they are not able to compete and they have to take a step back. Hence again because of lack of opportunity and proper means of training female labor force participation is less.

- **Sexual harassment at workplace**– this is always been a problem in India and a lot of women are still facing this issue in India. That is why many women left their jobs because of this reason or they do not want to work. This kind of activity is very gross because they treat women like an object. Most of the women in companies or in other places of work are work on a lower position and males are on the higher position. They exploit women in many manners. They took advantage of their family conditions. Sexual harassment can also be seen in hospitals, at home, in educational institutions and also in police station. This is very shocking that law protectors are the ones who violates the norms and the laws and took advantage of women.

**Case- Vishakha and others v. State of Rajasthan**<sup>1</sup> in this case what happened was that Vishakha which is a name of an NGO and other women's groups filed Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against the state of Rajasthan and the Union Government of India to authorize the essential privileges of working ladies under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The appeal was recorded after Bhanwari Devi; a social laborer in Rajasthan was severely assaulted for stopping a child marriage. Following 16 monotonous years an Act called 'Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act' (POSH Act)<sup>2</sup> was passed and this demonstration characterizes 'sexual harassment' in accordance with the Supreme Court's meaning of 'sexual harassment' in the Vishakha Judgment.

- **Maternity leaves**– This is also a big concern because in many cases women left their jobs due to maternity reasons. They do not get the sufficient leaves and sufficient money. Women did not get the maternity benefits.

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**Case- Anshu Rani v State of U. P. And 2 Others** in this case what happened was that the petitioner was married on 18.2.2018 and after that petitioner was conceived a child so, here in this case the petitioner doctor advised her to take complete bed rest then the petitioner submitted an application to the Block Education Officer as well as to the District Basic

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<sup>1</sup> 13 August, 1997

<sup>2</sup> 2013

Education Officer. They granted her maternity leave for only 90 days. The petitioner requested them and said that she wanted 180 days leave as her condition was also not good but they denied and they did not grant leave or more than 90 days. So, here we can see she was suffered and she did not get the full maternity leave.

- **Discrimination**– There is always a high possibility of discrimination in India. Because we know in many places male have the more authority than that of female. For example- if female works equally like men in terms of working hours but they face an issue of reduction in salary, or wages – male gets the higher amount of money but female worker not get that much. So, there is a discrimination which is faced by women not only in salary or in wages terms but also in promotional activities or when property is divided etc.

**Case– P.K Phutuppan v K.S. Girija**<sup>3</sup> this case is also talks about the violation of fundamental right and gender equality should be there is it in workplace or any other institution and also talks about the harassment at workplace.

- **Mental Harassment**– this mental harassment become a very big issue because in Indian society people see women that they are not able to the work like men can do all the work. There is always a misconception about this thing. They do not know that women are the pillars of the society they can do more work. People think that women can manage to do the household work and take care of the family. Society torture women and because of that mental pressure creates and in many cases they left their job because they did not get proper or equal treatment like men.
- **Income level**- as we know Indian society is male dominating society and if income level increases they think women do not have to work because now their income level is stable. Even if female is not married then they have to leave their job and do the household work. The society only sees the stability factor and again decline in women participation increases.
- **Social Attitude**- people live in rural area generally having an orthodox type of mentality. They think that their wives, daughters cannot do the work other than household work and

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<sup>3</sup> 27 August, 2008

they have a fear in their mind that always distracts them and that is why they wives and daughters for work.

- **Transport Facilities**– in rural areas the transport facilities are very less available and because of that the women cannot get a job in the urban areas. Even if they manages to get the job then they have to travel for a very long time and thinking of rural area people is more of stereotype they do not give them permission and they also have fear in their minds because the crime rate is also increasing. Due to lack of transport facilities like less number of bus services, roads are not properly constructed and because of that travelling will be time consuming but Central Government launched a scheme named Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana<sup>4</sup> and with the help of this scheme the roads are constructed properly and in year 2012 many more villages were accessible by good quality roads.
- **Infrastructure**- In small scale factories working environment is not good and females who works there generally face lot of difficulties for instance suffocation, lightning problems etc. most of the major problems arises when female have to sit in a particular posture while working and they have to work for 8 to 14 hours per day.
- **Education**- The problem in urban area female force participation is declining because in urban areas people mainly focuses on girl's education and for that they do every possible step so that their girl can get the best education. But when it comes to employing them, their families not allowed them to work. So, main question arises that why they are investing so much amount of money in their education? This is really disheartening that we are investing so much in their studies but we are not letting them work. The director of CSR<sup>5</sup> Dr. Ranjana she said that well-educated females like they are having degrees of doctors, engineer, lawyers etc. but they are not doing any job they are just sitting at home and making no contribution. I mean people do not know how to utilize education in a proper way, and the outcome of stereotype thinking will be harsh for the females as well as for the country's development. Along with education people should also promote job creation facilities and this is the need for more urbanization.

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<sup>4</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2000

<sup>5</sup>Center for Social Research

## IMPACT OF COVID- 19

We know that in India gender discrimination gap is widening and women are still trying to cop up with the problems like sexual harassment, female unemployment and many other things, the Covid-19 pandemic will likely intensify the situation. India is already in bad shape in terms of female labor participation in workforce for instance according to the report of Public Affairs Centre's over 80 percent of females are still remain outside the workforce. Now we can easily analyze how Covid-19 pandemic is effecting the situation. The labor participation was 41.9 percent in March 2020 and it was 42.6 percent in February 2020 and this is the first time when the rate has fallen to this extent and this data is given by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian's Economy. Due to this pandemic India's GDP rate is -23.9 % this is the first growth rate contraction in 40 years.

By this massive problems of financial crisis arise and because of that industry, company's starts retrenched their employees without giving any compensation. As this new normal came into existence and in this new normal technology plays a vital role because many people are working from home but major defect in this is that people also do not have access to these types of technologies and because of that the companies, industries instantly remove their employees. According to International Labor Organization on average basis women in India spend 5 hour on unpaid work every day and male only spend 29 minutes and this gap is growing faster in this pandemic time. New economy reforms and structures are necessary if we want to remove the gender gap otherwise like in this pandemic time problem of discrimination also increases and after this pandemic this problem still remain same if further majors has not been taken.

## GOVERNMENT REFORMS

- Females were facing an issue regarding maternity leaves. Therefore, Government took various important steps to increase female participation rate and Government introduce Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act<sup>6</sup>. This amended act provides for enhancement in paid maternity leave which was previously 12 weeks to 26 weeks. Now, female can take leave for 26 weeks.

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<sup>6</sup> 2017



- There are other measures are also provided in this amended Maternity Benefit Act- for instance crèche facilities should be provided so that female can take care of their child while working and this facility should be provided where more than 50 employees are working, another step is women can work in the night shifts as like men can do and proper safety measures should be provided to the females.
- To increase the female participation Government is providing special training to the females like WITI,<sup>7</sup> National and Regional Training Institutes are some institutes which provides training to them so that they can perform well and by this way they will participate more.
- Females are facing the issue of equal remuneration. Hence, Government said there should be equal pay for equal work and everyone should be treated equally. Hence The Equal Remuneration Act<sup>8</sup> provides for payment of equal remuneration to both male and female labor for same nature of work without any type of gender discrimination. As we can see in The Minimum Wages Act,<sup>9</sup> wages fixed by Government are equal for both male and female workers so that discrimination should be not arising.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As a result of this research work done, it is concluded that the situation of female labor force participation is declining at a very fast speed more so because of Covid- 19 pandemic. However, even prior to the pandemic the rate of female labor force participation was declining. The reasons for declining female labor force participation have already been discussed above also it is important to note that the Government reforms or policies are mostly made for the organized sector. As a result of which the females working in the unorganized sector are left out. Women who are working in the unorganized sector largely constitute women who do household work and there are no policies for such women.

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Further wherever welfare schemes and options exists for such women they are limited only to documentation and are not enforced in reality. In order to increase the participation of female labor force in the market the Government should allocates funds and implement the existing policies so that women benefit from them, For example job quota facilities and credit should

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<sup>7</sup> Women Industrial Training Institutes

<sup>8</sup> 1976

<sup>9</sup> 1948

be specially created for female so that they participate in the market labor force. Moreover employers should see that appropriate environment conditions are available for women in both the private and public sector. Creating a safe working environment would go far in eliminating the stigma and reducing the insecurities associated with working women also there, care should be taken and there should no caste related discrimination and gender related discrimination with working women. So, that more and more women come out to join the labor force.



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