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A historical analysis of Gender Inequality and its Contemporary Challenges for Women at Workplace

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Gender equality within the workplace has remained a persistent issue, with women encountering various obstacles and hurdles throughout their careers. This has manifested in the workplace, where women are assigned specific tasks that are subordinate, low-paying, and extremely exploitative, as positions of power and management are not perceived as 'feminine' in society. The study aimed examine the key factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women and the challenges they face in the workplace, and to analyze the historical progression of gender inequality in India's workforce and evaluate the impact of legal frameworks on improving women's workplace rights and protections. The qualitative research conducted under the descriptive and explanatory research methods. Thus, the study is intended to highlight the main social, cultural and economic factors being the causes of gender inequality having considered historical and present-day contexts in India. Furthermore, using the MS Word for statistical tools is convenient to compile and summarize the qualitative data and to produce meaningful conclusions. The findings showed that, after analyzing cultural and historical context it is possible to conclude that irrespective of the economic growth and the shift of sectors, women still face cultural and societal obstacles in achieving their economic opportunities and visibility in the different industries.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Workplace Inequality, Gender inequality, and Challenges for women in Employment.

1. Introduction

Gender equality within the workplace has remained a persistent issue, women encountering various obstacles and hurdles throughout their careers. Notwithstanding advancements over the past decades, gender gaps continue to exist in multiple facets of employment, such as remuneration, incentives, and leadership participation (Blau & Kahn, 2017). These disparities compromise the tenets of equity and justice, obstructing organizational efficacy and economic advancement (Hunt et al., 2015). Mitigating gender disparities in the workplace has emerged as a paramount concern for organizations, policymakers, and society.

The enduring nature of disparities between genders and prejudice inside organizations is fundamentally anchored in historical, intellectual, and societal influences that have established a gendered division of labor and an inequitable allocation of resources and authority amongst men and women (Heilman, 2012). Notwithstanding considerable advancements in women's educational achievements and workforce involvement in recent decades, gender inequalities in compensation, advancement, and leadership prospects persist across several sectors and professions. The disparities are frequently ascribed to a multifaceted interaction of individual, organizational, and societal elements, encompassing stereotypes regarding gender,

bias, as well as discrimination; business procedures and policies that disadvantage women; and overarching social and cultural norms that perpetuate conventional gender roles (Ridgeway, 2011).

For a long time, women have advocated for their freedoms and equitable treatment in society. Although they constitute about half of the workforce and represent the statistical majority in higher education attainment, they persistently earn significantly less (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). The patriarchy remains unchallenged, with the man believed to be the dominant member of the family and the woman positioned as subordinate to him. This has manifested in the workplace, where women are assigned specific tasks that are subordinate, low-paying, and extremely exploitative, as positions of power and management are not perceived as 'feminine' in society (Khuzwayo, 2016). This is also evident in the occupational roles permitted for men and women in the workplace, as well as in women's capacity to contest gender oppression due to their lack of a formidable voice to do so. The prominence of women in hospitality and service-related employment reinforces the notion that women are more 'fitted' for these industries than males, who are perceived to be suited for manufacturing and mining positions that highlight their 'innate' qualities based on their gender.

Gender disparity within organizations is a multifaceted issue observable in their structures, procedures, and practices. Women experience some of the most detrimental gender inequities through human resources (HR) practices. HR procedures, including policies, decision-making, and their implementation, influence the hiring, training, compensation, and advancement of women (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Discrimination against women in HR decision-making and the implementation of HR procedures arises from gender inequities within larger organizational frameworks, procedures, and practices.

The workplace has occasionally been characterized as an unwelcoming environment for women due to various manifestations of gender inequality. Instances of workplace discrimination adversely impact women's incomes and chances, including the gender wage gap, the scarcity of women in leadership positions, and the extended duration necessary for women to progress in their professions compared to men (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Workplace discrimination adversely affects women's socioeconomic status. Significantly, this prejudice against women can mostly be ascribed to human resources (HR) rules and HR-related decision-making. Moreover, when employees engage with corporate decision-makers regarding HR policies or get information about HR-related results, they may encounter personal prejudice manifested as sexist remarks (Gupta & Pathak, 2016). The objective drawbacks of reduced compensation, status, and possibilities in the workplace, alongside the subjective experiences of stigma, impact women's psychological and physical strain, physical and mental wellness, job satisfaction, organizational dedication, and eventually, their performance.

The need for the study arises from the fact that despite the concerted effort to empower women across the world, unequal advantages between male and female equality persist. Despite these improvements in the years that followed, gender inequality remains to be central to the operations of several business sectors and workplaces. The goal of the study is paramount in establishing historical prevalence of such inequalities, exploring how patriarchal systems and realities of culture and law have influenced women as workers. Furthermore, it is to understand the modern 'woman's issues' like the gender pay gap, female leadership and employment prejudice, and the lack of permissive measures like a maternity leave, flexible working hours. Thus, the study aims at advancing the current debate on gender equality and providing a necessary background for policies and practices that would change the modern workplace for a woman for the better. The paper is divided into seven sections. Section 1 comprises the introduction of the study. A literature review on historical analysis of gender inequality and its contemporary challenges for women at workplace is presented in section 2. Section 3 & 4 delineated the research methodology and objectives of the study. The results are presented in Section 5. It is succeeded by findings and discussion of the results in section 6. Section 7 contains the conclusion of the study. References have finally been included.

2. Review of Literature

Gender equality within the workplace is a fundamental ideal that transcends cultures, countries, and industries (Sultana et al., 2021). It embodies the conviction that all individuals, irrespective of gender, ought to possess equal opportunities, privileges, and treatment in the professional domain. The participation of women in entrepreneurship is steadily increasing. The ratio of growth-oriented and active women entrepreneurs to men entrepreneurs is one to three. In a nation such as India, women face difficulties stemming from insufficient education, societal constraints, and a lack of financial literacy (Kumar, et al., 2022).

The contributions of women are a crucial element in a nation's advancement. It is posited that when employees are afforded equitable opportunities and a non-discriminatory environment for advancement, they exhibit greater job satisfaction, anticipate prolonged tenure within the firm, and are significantly more inclined to recommend it as a favorable workplace (Singh, et al., 2022). Nevertheless, women in India face significant workplace disadvantages that limit their access to equitable opportunities. Workplace discrimination against women is instigated by various variables, including unfavorable treatment of employees based on impairment, their ages, genetic data, pregnancy, skin color or race, country origin, spirituality, or gender.

During the Vedic time, women in India possessed equal status with males in all facets of life. However, Indian society, akin to several 'traditional' societies, remains patriarchal. Explicit regulations restricting women from particular significant activities and denying specified rights were present (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Intrinsic elements such as growth, innovation, autonomy, and the rejection of traditional gender identities are fundamental motivators of women's business. Moreover, institutions present obstacles instead of providing inspiration for female entrepreneurs. The two primary hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs are stereotypes about gender and insufficient social capital. In patriarchal countries, entrepreneurial roles are perceived as more male than females (Shastri, et al., 2022). Moreover, cultural norms manifested in gender-specific role allocation contribute to the issue of work-life balance. The absence of connecting and bridging social assets for familial support and systems, respectively, indicates an adverse informal institutional setting (Barhate et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding the significant economic, social, and organizational progress attained by Saudi women over the past twenty years, research on their leadership remains concentrated on the structural inequality, organizational, and societal obstacles they encounter (Jamjoom & Mills, 2023). Numerous other U.S. firms have implemented extensive diversity initiatives. These programs exceed mere legal compliance and actively foster the inclusion of persons from different socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly women (Dover, et al., 2020).

The heightened involvement of women in the workforce is one of the most significant transformations in the labor sector during the last five decades. In accordance with these developments, "vocational and industrial/organizational (I/O)" scholarship regarding women and work has progressed from initial studies employing group difference methodologies to modern theories and research that integrate gender-specific cultural and environmental factors influencing women's work choices and behaviors (Flores, et al., 2021). Promoting and maintaining workplace cultures that endorse family and work-life balance, while avoiding discrimination against women, is essential for achieving gender equality (Chaudhary, et al., 2022).

The literature review reveals that there is a glaring research gap as to how cultural change at the society level and organisational level contributes to gender injustice in the workplace, especially in India. Despite numerous works done comparatively, on gender differences and women's issues, work discrimination and women entrepreneurship barriers and other opportunities offered to women executives, leadership roles all over the world; fewer articles and research have explored the problems that Indian women face in organisational context such as micro – social level prejudices, work family conflict, non-availability of structural support. Further, culture in general has not been adequately investigated as to its impact on women in the workplace and how particularly patriarchal cultures affect these women. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, more such research has become essential to establish an understanding of gender equality in Indian workplaces.

3. Research Methodology

The research methods used in this gender inequality study as applied to its modern dynamics for women in the workforce include qualitative research conducted under the descriptive and explanatory research methods. It becomes possible to perceive the elements of prejudice against women at work and the reasons for their underrepresentation by acknowledging this or that factor. In the study secondary methods was used, data was gathered from various sources such as articles, journal articles, reports by organizations that promote gender equality, historical papers that present the changes of gender roles in the workplace. The presented approach is useful for organizing existing knowledge and recognizing time trends. Thus, the study is intended to highlight the main social, cultural and economic factors being the causes of gender inequality having considered historical and present-day contexts. Furthermore, using the MS Word for statistical tools is convenient to compile and summarize the qualitative data and to come up with meaningful conclusions. This methodology not only focuses only on the history but also, situates the contemporary features of inequalities within a broader context. This perspective offers a deeper understanding of the present difficulties of women in the workforce. Lastly, the study aims at establishing the main challenges in the fight for increasing gender equality while also suggesting the directions that may help free women from these challenges.

4. Research Objectives

- **i.**To examine the key factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women and the challenges they face in the workplace.
- **ii.**To analyze the historical progression of gender inequality in India's workforce and evaluate the impact of legal frameworks on improving women's workplace rights and protections.

5. Results

i. To examine the key factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women and the challenges they face in the workplace.

The workplace is fraught with numerous challenges and issues that working-class Indian woman must confront daily. The nature and seriousness of these issues vary, but the most prevalent can be characterized as follows:

a) Gender Pay Gap

Equal pay for equal work does not exist in any nation. This data was made public in the "Global Gender Gap Report" Gender inequality in pay has persisted for nearly a century. There has been very little progress after the initial successes (Zahidi & Ibarra, 2010). There is a 25.4% gender wage discrepancy in India, according to the report. The survey identified a number of causes for the gender pay gap, such as employers' skewed preference for men over women, a lack of diversity in managerial roles, and the fact that women often have to take time off work to care for their families or deal with other social and cultural issues.

b) Sexual Harassment

Every day, Indian women confront the disgusting reality of sexual harassment. Upholding their sanctity in their homes, while traveling, at schools, and at work is their primary challenge every day. "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013" states that each business or government agency with 10 or more workers must have an "internal complaints commission (ICC)".

c) Insufficient Sanitation Infrastructure

Women endure hardships due to insufficient sanitation in their workplaces. As per the 2011 Indian Census, the female population in India stands at 587 million, representing 48 percent of the total population (Venugopal, et al., 2016). Nonetheless, merely 29% of women aged fifteen and older engage in the workforce. A contributing factor may be the lack of safety for women, which is associated with their limited access to sanitation facilities.

d) Gender based Discrimination

Gender discrimination exists in the workplace regarding benefits, hours, leave, salaries, opportunities, and promotions. Based on their most recent survey, "Bias@Workplace," India Inc. (mostly in the topmost eight cities) still hasn't completely embraced the idea of equal opportunity. The survey found that biased hiring practices and policies are rather common in the workplace (Sabharwal, 2023). At every stage of the hiring process and in the competition for work chances, women who are pregnant or have young children have disadvantages.

ii. To analyze the historical progression of gender inequality in India's workforce and evaluate the impact of legal frameworks on improving women's workplace rights and protections

Since India gained its independence in the year 1947, the nation's economy has seen substantial transformations. Agriculture presently constitutes merely one-third of GDP, a decline from fifty-nine percent in 1950, with a diverse array of contemporary industries and services being accessible. Support services are presently accessible (Jayachandran, 2015). Agriculture remains predominant despite these alterations. In this sector, 66% of the population finds gainful employment. Economic difficulties beset India throughout the 1990s. Things were already bad in the '80s and '90s, but the Persian Gulf War made them much worse.

In 1992, India began enacting policies that would liberalize its commerce. Things have looked up for the economy. During the period, the yearly increase in GDP ranged from 5% to 7%. Substantial advancements have been made in relaxing governmental regulations, especially within the banking industry. Private enterprises are governed by rules.

Women's labor and accomplishments have been esteemed throughout history; however their value has never been acknowledged. No one generalization can be applied uniformly to the many different geographical, religious, personal, and economic groupings in India because of the country's diverse society (Sundari, 2020). Nevertheless, other overarching conditions affecting Indian women influence their economic engagement. Caste, class, wealth, and power are the four main determinants of an individual's status in Indian society. Even in less obvious places, like some business settings, this categorization remains.

Women have been marginalized in economic endeavors due to the technical inputs given by globalization, although men have generally received enhanced possibilities for education and training. As a result, more and more women are joining the informal or unregulated workforce. For example, although new rice technologies have increased the participation of women in the workforce, women still face a disproportionate share of the unpaid and often overlooked domestic labor force. Women and other marginalized peoples are disproportionately denied access to healthcare. Consequently, the majority of Indian women has limited capacity to engage in productive employment; the absence of choice among alternatives underscores this deficiency.

a) Law related to Women Protections

• The Indian Constitution

The Constitution protects equality as a "Fundamental Right." Article 15 encompasses stipulations for women, children, and others that are educationally and socially marginalized. These provisions are devoid of any discriminatory elements.

Article 16 ensures equal opportunity in public employment. An equal number of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipality are guaranteed under the "73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution" and the 74th Amendment Act, respectively.

• The National Commission for Women Act, 1990

The government set up a "National Commission for Women" to look into allegations of rights violations, assess the effectiveness of existing legal safeguards for women, report back to the Central Government on a regular basis on the status of women's rights, and provide financial assistance for lawsuits involving women's issues (Vijayawargiya, 1992).

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

The "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013" is an Indian legal measure designed to safeguard women against sexual harassment in the workplace. It mandates the establishment of an 'Internal Complaints Committee' within the workplace and a 'Local Complaints Committee' at district and blocks levels. The Act is an Indian statute designed to safeguard women in the workplace against sexual harassment. This Act supplanted the "Supreme Court of India's Vishakha Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment" (Agarwala, 2018). The legislation defines sexual harassment and outlines a process for addressing complaints. It creates two committees: one for workplace complaints and one for district and block complaints. The Act is to be administered and monitored by a district authority, who is either the District Collector or the Deputy Collector.

• The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016

A proposal that benefits around 1.8 million women was passed by the Indian Parliament on March 9, 2017, increasing the subsidized maternity leave for women working in the organized sector from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. All businesses with 10 or more employees be subject to the law, and the benefit only be available to the first two generations. The length of time allowed for the third child is set at twelve weeks. Consequently, India currently possesses the third-longest maternity leave globally.

6. Findings and Discussion

From the research study, there are major deficiencies that beckon for address if the woman unemployment situation in India is to improve. The growing issues that include the following; gender pay gap, Sexual harassment, sanitation and facilities, and employment discrimination on the base of gender. In addition, although India employs several legal approaches such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 and Maternity Benefit Amendment Bill, 2016 to fight workplace inequalities, enforcement of these laws of workplace inequalities is still unpredictable. Analyzing cultural and historical context it is possible to conclude that irrespective of the economic growth and the shift of sectors, women still face cultural and societal obstacles in achieving their economic opportunities and visibility in the different industries.

While Flores, et al., (2021), included global issues like quality of jobs, availability of mentors, and climate at workplace, the current study stated issues that are peculiar to India, including unequal pay for equal work, quantum of sexual harassment, and lack of sufficient legislative support. In both analyses the studies made efforts to emphasize the future work to be done that would include finding ways to remove systematic factors and bring changes to cultural expectations related to women's employment and their rights in the workplace. The study by MacLean (2022) was specifically directed at the cognitive bias of professionals such as workplace investigators and how these influence the evidence collection and the judgment made. On the other hand, our study discussed systematic gender discrimination in the context of the Indian labor market which include, Gender wage gap, Discrimination and loopholes with legal measures for women employees. Whereas MacLean (2022) has introduced object-level cognitive biases, in our analysis we have identified external constraints and legal requirements that impair gender parity in the workplace.

The study by Shastri, et al., (2022), inspected women entrepreneurs in Rajasthan included self-actualization factors such as autonomy and creativity and external factors like gender bias, absence of social capital, and work-family conflict in a patriarchal culture. However, our study on women in the Indian workforce pointed out systematic problems such as a salary disparity between male and female employees, sexual harassment, and the lack of adequate legal provisions for women employees. Two studies emphasized on the fact that social and organizational enclaves that still prevent women from gaining equal employment opportunities. Singh, et al., (2022) carried out a study on the Indian airline sector and constraints facing women at the

Singh, et al., (2022) carried out a study on the Indian airline sector and constraints facing women at the workplace while the current study looks at the challenges facing women in other sectors the gender pay,

discrimination etc. These two studies also emphasized the significance of putting measures that would assist in easing pre-existing gender gaps and triangulate the female labour force participation. These two studies revealed system, cultural and environmental constraints to women career progress in the workplace. They have shown here how gender issues have become embedded in culture them and are ingrained beyond legislations and monetization. The study by Jamjoom & Mills (2023), looked at how Saudi women practice resistance at the workplace whereas our study showed the systematic issues including the gender pay issue. Both recognized cultural issues that posed serious setback to women vying for careers and in attempts to secure well-paying jobs in non-western countries.

7. Conclusion

The study progresses to show that, although India is liberal in terms of legislative measures as well as promoting economic liberalization, the country has a long way to go for it has high and unbalanced gender segmentation in labor market. Some of these challenges are as follow; the gender pay gap; women are paid less than men, inadequate sanitation, sexual harassment and discrimination, women's advancement is still a mirage. While these policies for example the "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and the Maternity Benefit Amendment Bill" exist, the enforcement and attainment of rights provided under such policies is not equal. These problems are facilitated by traditions and male dominance; workplaces are still closed to women in most industries.

The study emphasized the call for more vehement legal changes, gender equality laws implementation, better physical facilities at the workplace for better sanitation, and gender-specific legislation that would lead to call for ending the disparity in wages between women and men as well as discrimination of the former at workplaces. Therefore organisations have to practice the right measures in an organisation like; including leadership development for women, sponsoring women in leadership roles, mentorship and including policies such as flexible working hours to enhance the situation.

Also exists some of the limitation of the study, like secondary data might conceal some details of women's experience especially minority women. This may give little attention to the needs of rural women in India, as other problems such as lack of basic facilities at working environment and severe discriminative culture against women are worse. In addition, the study does not explore how caste class and religion compounded in the Indian context might compound gender disparities.

Subsequent researches should focus on making primary data collection through survey or interviews in order to collect denser level, more individualized sentiments and perceptions within sectors, or regions, particularly in rural. More studies should also be done on caste class and religious aspects of gender workplace discrimination in relation to women's labor market engagement. As well, one should define the effectiveness of existing laws that regulate the role of woman and man at the work, as well as how the company's diversity policy works in real life and has the major drawbacks.

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