

Mental Torture of Women At Workplace: Cause and Prevention

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Introduction

"यत्र नारीयस्तु पूजयन्ते रामन्ते तत्र देवताह।"

Meaning of this very famous Sanskrit Shloka is very inspiring and beautiful. Gods dwell where women are worshipped. However, we have not lived up to the meaning of this shloka. Women have been considered second grade citizens all over the world. In the great epic of Mahabharata, Draupadi the wife of five Pandavas was put to gamble as a property in the game of gambling between Kauravas and Pandavas. In the Western world also, male domination over the society has been common and it still persists in various manners.^[1] In Muslims, men can marry with four women at a time but women have very limited space. Very recently the Indian Government legally banned customary 'Triple Talaq' in one go.^[2] However, our objective is not to highlight atrocities inflicted upon women. Through this article we wish to attract

attention of the masses in general and students, sociologists, politicians specifically towards the menace of harassment of women at places of work.

Men and women are equal partners in human society. However, news relating to harassment of women, eve teasing, sexual molestation, rape and murder of innocent women keeps pouring in regularly through almost all media. This menace has crept into the workplaces too. Women, who work hard to win a job, have to encounter mental torture and molestation at workplaces. They are considered easy targets, as it is a general view that women are physically inferior to their male counterparts. This article looks into this menace and proposes some solutions which may prove milestones when it comes to safety of women at workplaces. Root cause of the problem lies in male chauvinism. This article discovers the causes of the problem and finds various legal and social issues which are required to be addressed.

Cause

In the coming paragraphs, we will study the causes as to why this tendency against women began. What are the reasons which lead to molestation and harassment of women? Historically, our society evolved under male domination. The senior most man and not the woman was considered as the head of the family. Important decisions were taken by him. There was no involvement of female members of the family in decision making. In the present scenario also, Hindu joint families are governed by 'Karta'

who is the senior most member^[3]

This supremacy of male members of the society became the fundamental reason for women 's exploitation at various levels including workplaces. Unless it comes in public domain, they do not even wish to discuss the matter, let alone complaining to competent authorities. This timid nature of women encourages men to exploit them.

Men and women are two poles of a magnetic field and the rule of “opposites attract and similar repel” applies to these poles. It is common in every community that young ladies with fascinating looks attract men. This is quite natural. Nature has created this tendency in order to expand the species. It is true that it is this very attraction between men and women which leads to creation. However, uncontrolled attraction leads to uncontrolled behaviour and consequences of which have to be borne by the ladies who wish to work with their male counterparts shoulder to shoulder. What is wrong in it? Nothing. But these socio psychological reasons don't let her fulfill her wish.

At workplaces, women need to interact with their male counterparts. Obviously, they make friendly gestures like offering snacks, asking for tea/coffee and other similar things at places of work exactly as others do. They do all this as social mannerism. But instead of praising this good behaviour of females, men take it as an indication of intimate relations. This leads to various misunderstandings and ends more often than not, with undue misadventures.

When a man fails in his forward move to establish intimate relations with a female employee, he starts to spit venom in the form of baseless and frivolous rumours against the lady who withstood his invitation and did not heed to it. This leads to a bad name for the lady. Other employees look at her with disdain or try to take advantage of the situation. The lady gets in a fix. If she tells about it at home, her parents or husband (as the case may be) either ask her to quit the job or advise her to get silent over the matter. In either case, it is the lady who suffers.

Besides the above reasons, various social customs and traditions don't permit ladies to go out and work. Parents of young girls have their own fears and misconceptions. Daughters are taught by their own mothers that they have to work at home and their brothers have to manage assignments outside the home. Girls are discouraged to carry out higher studies. Parents do not like to spend much on girls' education as they have to marry and go to somebody else's house. Although UNICEF says that educated girls become productive members of the families and also help in regulating population and curbing inequality, yet it is regretful that they have to discontinue their education at the behest of their parents.^[4] Education is key to employment. But girls have to leave school. According to UNESCO, 13.2crores girls are out of school worldwide.^[5]

This question has haunted society. Internationally, it was discussed firstly in 1994 International Conference on

Population and Development, then in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and lastly at the 2000 Millennium Summit. ^[6] In India, girls have right to education in accordance with Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, (2009)^[7] But yet many girls leave school without completing their schooling. As a result, these girls have to compromise with petty jobs like domestic aids, sweepers etc., in order to get both ends meet. Those girls who somehow complete their education, get married and after marriage, the decision to work or not goes with the husbands. Hence, most girls, who can be productive members of families and can contribute in nation building, are left just to bear children and work for their upbringing.

Many jobs are not considered good for women. Jobs like travel agents, journalists, nurses, etc. are considered as 'bad ones' by parents of girls. Fear of parents is not baseless either. Doctors have been found molesting nurses. According to 'Times of India' 11 Jul-2021, (Mumbai Edition, A doctor from Nalasopara was booked for allegedly molesting a nurse working in his hospital. ^[8] several of such examples can be cited. Likewise parents do not wish their daughters to become journalists^[9]

Around two centuries back, women did not have voting rights. They got this right after much ado in the previous century in so-called civilized European nations. Let us be proud of our nation that India provided the same at the time of framing of our constitution and in India, women did not

have to fight for it.

One more issue needs to be discussed here. Our cinema and advertisement Industry presents women in a bad light. Women have to expose their body in order for the movie to do good at the box office. They have to expose themselves in order for the product to be sold. Newspapers present snaps of half-naked women in order to sell their newspaper. All this is very disgusting. Our entertainment Industry has presented women as a product which can be bought, used and disposed of. This is a pathetic situation. Songs like “Choli ke peeche kya hai”, “mummy papa hai nahi ghar men”, “Chikni Chameli”, etc., do not create a good environment for women to come out and work shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts.

In defense forces, paramilitary forces as well as in the police, situation is no better. To find space in police force and military forces, women had to undergo a lot of struggle and perseverance. Since 1992, women were first inducted in to various branches of Indian Army only in short service commission. In 2008, women were first inducted as permanent commissioned officers in Legal and Education corps, in 2020 they were first inducted in 8 more corps as permanent commissioned officers. However, they are presently struggling to get permanent commission in the air force. Even after the supreme court intervention, all applications of women in this regard have been rejected on petty pretexts.^[10]

In sports, women have shown their skills and supremacy but yet matters of their molestation by their coaches and other male members keep pouring in.

Present status

Now let us look into the present working conditions of women. Let us analyse as to how safe are workplaces for women.

On a daily basis, we come across news of harassment of women at work places. Such complaints come not only from the ladies who work for the state and central establishments, but also from the female employees of multinational Companies, Bollywood, TV/news media etc. Various movie actresses had to commit suicide under abnormal circumstances. Very recently, a BHEL (Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd.) committed suicide as her employer wanted her to succumb to his wishes.^[11]

At workplaces not only in India but around the world the environment is against women. In the educational institutions also women students as well as women employees have to face harassment at various levels. Complaints of molestations from Ph. D. students against their research supervisors are common.^[12] Search for 'women molestation' and thousands of results will appear in any search engine. Therefore, the situation is very grim and we need to get quick remedies.

Solutions

As we have submitted earlier, this problem of harassment of women at workplaces is very deeply rooted and quick solutions are hard to even imagine, let alone implementation of such remedies. But yet we cannot sit silently and let all this happen. We have to get involved into it and take vital decisions which may give some consolation to working women who not only earn money for their families but also have to work tirelessly at home in order to satisfy needs of her kids, husband, in laws etc. it is a big irony that on one side, family wants women to go and earn some money for the family and on the other, she is not supported at home by sharing some of the domestic assignments by other family members. Sound of tinkling coins attracts women to leave the boundaries of their home and come out to work. She wants to guarantee a good future for her family and happily adjusts domestic assignments and office workload both. But in return, she is molested and harassed and above all her family thinks it is her mistake. At the time when she needs moral support and mental recognition by those whom she loves and for whose needs she tolerates these atrocities, they think it is the woman who is at fault.

In 1997, the Supreme court of India while hearing a case held that serious negligence has been observed when it comes to rights of women at work places. In this case, Vishaka and Others Vs. State of Rajasthan and Others ^[13] Supreme Court observed that human rights of women are not

adequately protected in accordance with the definition of 'human rights' as provided under Section 2 (d) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, it is important to frame specific guidelines to be followed by the employers. Hence a committee was appointed to frame such guidelines as decided by the highest court. These guidelines were called as 'Vishakha Guidelines'.^[14]

According to these guidelines, at every workplace, where the number of employees is more than the number given in the guidelines (which keeps on changing as per the requirements), a committee titled, 'sexual harassment committee' has to be formed having sufficient female members. It is the responsibility of the head of the workplace or any person appointed by him/working under his instructions as the chief, that this committee will be constituted according to the vishakha guidelines.

Around seven years back, an act called THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT, 2013 (posh act)[15] came into effect. According to the act, it is mandatory for the employer that the Constitution of Internal Complaints Committee must be formed as mandated in section 4, chapter 2.

Unfortunately, after a long legal battle, it is the women and not the men who lose. Molesters enjoy whereas sufferer women undergo mental trauma along with social defamation. In fact, laws and law temples can suggest ways and methods

to stop the crime. At times, they punish criminals too. But they cannot change their attitude. They cannot mend bad habits of molesters and exploiters. It is through social campaigns, family support, socio psychological counseling that we can improve the situation. Government has come forward and amended the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 to expand the definition of sexual harassment as well as that of a 'workplace'. This amendment came in 2018. [16]

According to the new rules, . Any implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment in employment or creating a hostile work environment for a women employee would now amount to sexual harassment, say a new set of provisions inserted by the government into the service conduct rules on November 19, 2018. But as we know, rules are not enough. Mentality of the molester needs to change. Parents can play a major role in it. Parents have to teach their sons to respect girls and their dignity. For every molestation of a girl, a boy is responsible. So if we can improve our boys, if we change the style of upbringing of boys, this menace of female harassment can be curbed. Whenever a son comes late at home, his parents should ask him about his appointments/assignments. They have a strict vigil upon their daughters but give full relaxation to their son. This is the fundamental mistake that the parents commit. They need to have a strict vigil on their sons too.

Secondly, sons should not be given preferential treatment in the family. When men and women are equal

before law, why to give weightage to boys and create inferiority complex in girls? We should change our mindset and recognize the equal status of boys and girls. Both need equal opportunities and equal treatment. We can do this and we must change our attitude. Service begins at home. Before teaching others about equal treatment towards women, we should begin the same in our families.

Moreover, social campaigns can be taken up. Electronic/print media can contribute towards this drive. All the legal provisions should strictly be followed. By all these measures, we can curb this social disease of women harassment at workplaces.

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