
WOMEN AND WORK-THEIR CONDITION IN THE WORK PLACE

LINAMEEDAS

Abstract: Women are not new entrants in the labour market. They worked in mines and mills in Western Europe after the industrial revolution. However, the kind of work they get and the treatment that they receive in the workplace draw attention. Unlike men, the employment rate of women is less. Women are not considered for some professions. In others, they face discrimination. In Britain and Europe during the 1890s to 1920s, protective legislations restricted women's access to non-traditional occupations. Women's work in the non-traditional domain is portrayed as immoral by various writings of the time. This undermined women's right to be a worker (Williams 1997). This happens because of gendered segregation of work. This paper will throw light on how women are discriminated in the work place. The paper is based on the hypothesis-“societal norms that emanate from patriarchal structure determine the condition and position of women workers and compels them to work in precarious condition”.

Introduction : In this paper, qualitative methodology is employed as secondary literature is considered. Chapters in books, peer-reviewed journal articles as well publication of International Labour Organization are considered. This paper is analytical as it tries to understand the causes that determine the condition of women workers. Both formal and informal sector will be covered to analyze the state of women workers.

Women and work- role of patriarchal structure and condition of work: It has already been mentioned that women are mainly placed in the informal sectors. There are many explanations to understand the feminization of informal sector. According to Chen (2001), unlike men, women are unable to compete in the labour, capital and product markets. This can be attributed to their low level of education and skills in addition to their ignorance about 'market know-how'. Social and cultural norms play a role at large as it curtails investment on their education and training because of their reproductive role (Chen 2001 and Ramani et al. 2013). However, despite the rise in the level of women's education and skills, they are not employed in quality jobs. According to Standing (1999), the changes in the labour market also causes changes in the requirements as well. There is a marked decline in 'craft skill' acquired through internship or training. Men were employed in such jobs that required particular skills and women are always considered as unskilled. This resulted in polarization of skills and jobs, a minority of workers having specialized skills and majority with minor training. Therefore, there are two kinds of jobs now -one 'progressive' which is monopolized by men and the other one 'static' meant for women with low upward mobility and returns (Anker and Hein 1985, Standing 1999, Enloe 2014). As a result, although women are employed in large numbers in the informal sector their condition has not improved. The informal sector is characterized by less job security, lower incomes, the absence of access

to a range of social benefits, precarious working conditions and fewer possibilities to participate in formal education and training programmes (Anker and Hein 1985, Standing 1999, Chen 2000, Bacchetta et al 2009 and Ramani et al. 2013).

Women are not unskilled workers per se, but the patriarchal structure in the work place makes their job cheap. Enloe (2014) has taken the example of the garment industry and illustrated how women's work is made cheap, and they are paid less on the pretext of that. Firstly, women are considered 'naturally' and 'traditionally' good at sewing and that is why they are paid a low wage. The employers believe that a work that someone does naturally is not considered as skill. Secondly, supposedly skilled works such as pressing and zipper fitting are reserved for men. Thirdly, women are considered as secondary breadwinners of their families to justify the low wage paid to them. When in reality many women are the primary breadwinners as a single mother, widowed or unmarried daughter or sister. A woman who devotes an equal amount of time and hard work as a male worker do is considered as someone who is working until she finds a husband and settles down. These assumptions not only limit opportunities for women workers but also deny many amenities to them. This also results in negligence of women workers.

Women's work are not only made cheap but also considered as safe. Less attention is paid to occupational safety and health of women. In the case of factory works, women are mostly employed to do repetitive work like packing that require them to sit for long in the same place that can lead to musculoskeletal diseases. Whereas men are engaged in heavy lifting and carrying and, therefore, their work is considered as dangerous. If health problems are identified among women workers, too often they are attributed to unfit for the job or hormonal factors. There are additional problems as well; many industries do not hire women and fire pregnant women as a protective measure. Exhibiting this bias

ergonomics, the science of making jobs suitable to workers according to their physical requirement, neglects the issue of women. Protective equipment is provided according to the requirements and specificities of male workers. Work of female worker is equally stressful and at times dangerous for them. They also face violence, and sexual assault in many workplaces but these factors are rarely considered. In the case of compensation, men are paid three to ten times more than that of women (Messing 1998, Kane 1999, Murthy and Smith 2010 and Stellman et al. 2012).

The household works of women are not even considered, as such works are not recognized as occupation or any economic activity. Women who are employed in some jobs have to perform two to three shift works both at the house and outside. As a result, women workers work longer hours than men work but are not paid any credit or attention for that. Sweden is considered as one of the advanced countries regarding the condition of workers. However, Monica Boethius, the head of *Swedish Work Environment Fund's* equality programme also recognizes the agony of women workers and says, "Despite decades of campaigning for equality, women still earn less than men, have less chance of promotion, often given work not up to their qualifications and are more exposed to health hazards than men" (Dewan 1998).

Because of the discrimination and patriarchal structure, the condition of women in the workplace also draws attention. The working condition and the rights of workers in the informal sector are very difficult to identify and understand. The informal sector is comprised of different kinds of workers. Domestic workers comprise a major group in this sector. The typical task of domestic workers is to work in private homes and perform care work and household chores. These kinds of works are gendered, and women workers mainly perform these tasks. Thus, they are in the majority as domestic workers. The job of the domestic worker or domestic help also promotes migration among women, as many families living in another country prefer workers from the native country. Although it provides work and money to many women, the kind of work that they perform and the condition of their work are very precarious as they work in private homes. Sometimes they are excluded from the ambit of labour legislation. There is a recent case of an Indian house cleaner whose hand was cut off by her employer as she complained about her work

condition. There are many crimes against domestic workers, which unlike this one go unreported (Albin 2012, Ramani 2013 and Janardhan2015).

Women face discrimination in the formal sector. They are mostly employed in the health care and teaching sector because of their conventional nature of caring and nurturing. However, their male counterparts in formal sector overshadow them regarding opportunities. Women in nursing profession face many health risks. Although everyone related to health sector are exposed to a health hazard, as they play a crucial role as in the care delivery system, nurses are very vulnerable. The occupational hazards of nurses can be categorised as biological as they are exposed to infectious disease; chemical as they have to use drugs and chemical based substance; physical hazards emanate from nature of their work. They may face needle puncture, sprain, back pain along with assault and exposure to radiation. Work-related stress and shift work also cause psychological hazards for nurses. Although they come under the preview of work-related legislation the risk to their life and well-being is not less threatening (Tan 1991 and Sharma 2015).

Conclusion- findings of the study and way forward: Women as workers face acute problems whether they work in the formal or informal sector. The hypothesis of the paper is tested and confirmed in the preceding analysis. The impact of patriarchy on the condition and position of women in the workplace has been already analyzed. Women workers not only face numerical disadvantage and discrimination regarding employment, but they also have to work in a precarious condition. Although formal and informal sectors are different, women in both the sector face problems.

The problems that women face in the work place are very grave in nature and emanate from societal norms. Therefore, it is important to address problems in the patriarchal structure. However, it will take long to change the centuries-old practices. Until such a time comes, it is important to encourage research on issues of women workers, like lower salary, less employment rate and negligence of their safety in the workplace. Awareness should also be created among women workers to make them vigilant about their rights as workers as there are many international labour standards instituted by the International Labour Organization (ILO). For the realization of these rights, active trade unions of women are very essential.

References:

Industrial revolution witnessed the invention of machines to produce more products in less time. As machinery dispensed with muscular power, labourers of slight muscular were also employed. This led to employment of women and children (Marx 1890).

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