

Feminism through feminine benefits at workplace: An emerging trend

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ABSTRACT

According to G.D Anderson;

“Feminism isn’t about making women strong. Women are already strong. It’s about changing the way the world perceives that strength”

This paper has been designed considering the ubiquitous problems faced by working women in India, the impediments faced by them in the organizations and the **CORPORATE ACTIONS FOR FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT (CAFÉ)**. The study will also reveal the impact of the feminine benefits on the efficiency of the working women in India.

It is a descriptive study with information drawn from the secondary source. The study discloses the role of women as a domestic engineer and as a professional worker and the problems she faces in managing these two roles. Further, the challenges she faces in the organization due to gender inequality, favoritism, lack of feminine benefits, congenial environment, sexual harassment at workplace etc. The analysis is likely to reveal the role of feminine benefits on the efficiency of the working women that is if the feminine benefits are delivered by the organizations then the women can utilize their optimum capacity and show their potential in the which will eventually be beneficial for the organization as the women constitute an important part of the workforce of any organization and the development of women is directly interrelated with the development of the organization.

According to Swami Vivekananda,

“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”

The study ends with the indication about the additional feminine benefits that if furnished by the organization would result in increasing the efficiency of the working women and finally leads to human resource development.

Keyword: - Feminism, Feminine benefits, Workplace Efficiency, Harassment, Human Resource Management.

Introduction:

Working women in India constitute a considerable part of the workforce of the country, despite the fact that she has to fulfill her household and professional duties hand in hand. She crosses thousands of hurdles to balance her work life as well as to manage her daily course. She has ventured into outer fields but her traditional roles as a mother, sister and wife keeps on demanding and hence the woman is divided between her official work and home duties. Her responsibility starts from the early in the morning as a home maker which continues during office hours. She plays entirely two different roles in home and in office. Her piteous position, working at home as well as in office, is not admired, sometimes even by her husband, mother in law or father in law. Husband is free to take excuses of his overburdened work pressure but wife is always expected to be pristine and gracious all the time. The man considers working at home is the sole responsibility of a woman and if he does something it is done as per his wish and convenience. As collate in the foreign country, the household responsibilities are divided proportionately among husband and wife.

The working atmosphere in the office is also not congenial for woman. Most of the male counterparts treat woman lower in position and less nimble than them. Sometimes the working conditions are not felicitous for her and as a result she lacks in showing her optimum efficacy. **Gilmer (1984)** found that “working conditions were more important for female than male worker, especially for married ones.”

The problems of the working women are endless and peculiar and differ from office to office, and person to person. In this zippy changing world, the analysis is necessary to save the career of working women from their ever increasing hardships. If an organization wants its human resource development, then it has to pay special attention towards increasing the feminine benefits so that the efficiency of a woman can be increased and they can give their best in the organization.

Study objective:

The study has been conducted to take stock of various initiatives that should be taken by the organizations for the empowerment of working women in India with following objectives or purposes:

1. To examine a ubiquitous problem faced by working women in an organization.
2. To study the impact of amenities provided by an organization towards the efficiency of a working woman in India.

The present study is descriptive in nature with information, analysis and conclusion drawn from various secondary sources. It's an exploratory study for knowing the insights of the topic. It is referred paper.

Problems faced by working women in an organization:

Women face various kind of mental and physical harassment at workplace from senior management and colleagues. “Harassment may be defines as any improper and unwelcome conduct that might reasonably expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person. Harassment

may take the form of words, gestures or actions which tend to alarm, annoy abuse, demean, intimidate, belittle, humiliate or embarrass others or which create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.” (B. Unnikrishnan, IJCM)

The incident of intentional touching, sexually evocative remarks to out and out groping, eve teasing are some of the common examples which create lot of irritation and make the women unnecessarily defensive. **As was the recent harassment case of justice A.K Ganguly with his law intern or Tehalka chief Tarun Tejpal with his subordinate.** With women entering into new fields, they become more vulnerable to the dangers like eve teasing, sexual advancement, transfers etc. in addition to these hardships. The women are bound to play their traditional role as a mother and wife. While performing their natural roles they have to sometimes sacrifice their professional duty which degrades their efficiency. One more anomalous problem that a working women faces when their husband are transferred out of time, and they are unable to shift being a working women and the children prefer to stay with mother. Now they have to perform the dual role of both mother and father and their duties are tripled. Ultimately they decide to quit their job as they are confused of giving priority to which responsibility. Hence their professional lives are disdain. **Desai (1984)** said that “Women had managed the dual role of homemaker and worker, poses serious problems without working women in large cities, particularly with young mothers who often get no help of supportive services such as day care, community crèche, foster day care etc. their opportunities got further eventuated when they had to commute from long distance. Under these circumstances the traditional pattern of mutual help by in laws, friends, neighbors have been found extremely helpful whenever possible. However, it is not always possible.”

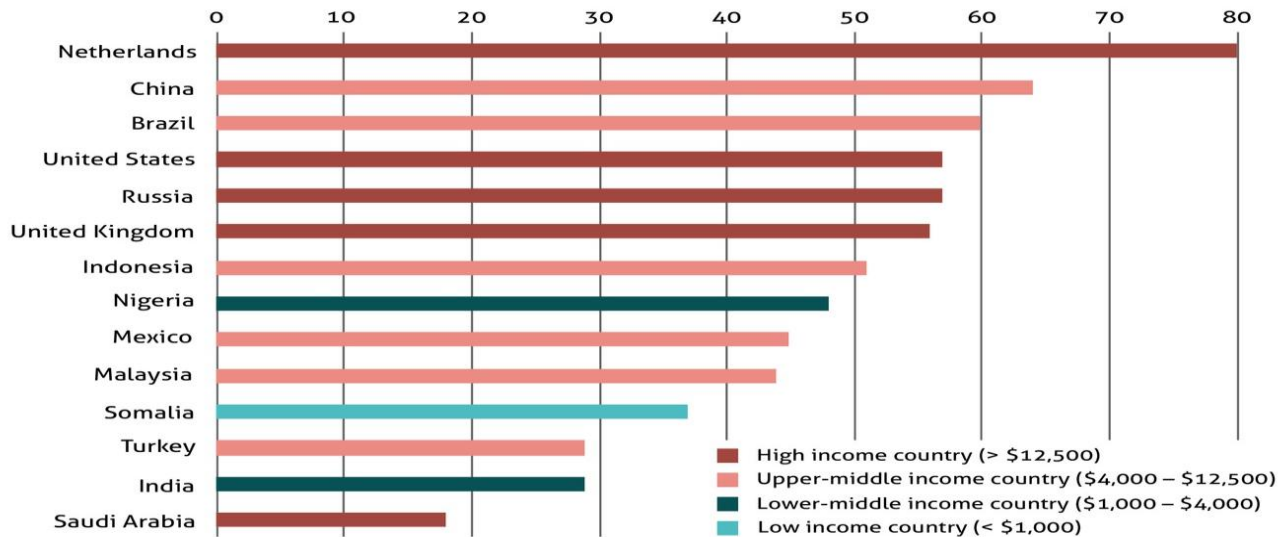
According to Moorty Uppaluri, CEO at Radstad India and Sri Lanka, “Despite various efforts to build gender diversity in the workplace, corporate India still have less than 5% of women at the top management and board levels. Also, only 50% of women who graduate from business school enter the workforce.” (Business Line, March 10, 2014)

Generally, there is still a glass ceiling at work, due to lack of proper guidance, partiality on the basis of gender, women do not want to get transferred if they are promoted and they decide to stay back in the particular city by giving importance to the traditional role.

Fig.1 Country income classes based on gross national income per capita for 2012 adjusted for purchasing power parity. As can be seen from the above chart, women’s workforce participation rate is lowest after Saudi Arabia. The reason cited are; in the rural areas most of the women are engaged in agricultural activities, to a certain extent men control the lives of women and if they are financially sound they don’t allow their wives to do job as they think the women need to divide their time in household and official duties and if they are doing their job it is out of financial necessity and not because of their choice. Women who are graduates have different aspirations and jobs offered to them are mostly related with sales and marketing as they are considered to be more patient, calm and elegant which they avoid to do due to safety and security concerns. **Fig.1**

Women's workforce participation rate 2009-2013

Economically active proportion of the population older than 15 years of age



Source: Akshat Rathi/ theconversation.com, Data: World Bank

Women tend to drop out at the mid career level position as they prioritize personal commitment and find it difficult to balance organizational demand, career aspiration and family commitment. **(THE HINDU, Business Line- March 10, 2014)**

Explaining the problems faced by women, K Rajkumar, executive director at ICICI bank, had said last year "There are very poor childcare and pediatric facilities in India and unlike in past, grandmothers no longer want to baby sit their daughters and son's children." **(Business Line, March 10, 2014)**

Shanti Ekambaram, Kotak banks president of corporate and investment banking, "There are highly educated women who are competent and skilled but feel they have lost 5-10 years of their career while raising their kids. But their competence and skills are so strong that we can use them" **(Business Line, March 10, 2014)**

Another problem which a working women faces is the late night work and commuting from office to home. In era of globalization, the number of women working in night shifts is increasing with call centre and export oriented units in export processing zone without providing proper protection to transport facilities to them. This resultantly leads to uncertain apocalypse like rape incidences in the country. This reduces if the organization provides the cab facilities to the women employees. The next major problem which the women faces is they cannot move out of the city for the job, they have to seek job where their husband are already engaged in the job and may be the opportunities are not adequate for the women in that particular place so they have to compromise with less salary and lower position in the organization. Sometimes the employers take the benefit of this drawback and convince them with less salary package only. This ultimately hinders the growth of the women.

CAFE: Corporate Action for Feminist Empowerment.

Corporate can play a vital role in empowering women. As empowerment not only defines to give authority rather than it also includes giving autonomy to women employee so that they are mentally free to work and show their full potential in the organization. This is only possible if every organization provides feminine benefits to employees.

Feminine benefits include the special benefits like safe working environment, cab facilities, crèche facilities, maternity benefits, stringent laws against sexual harassment at workplace, female doctors in occupational health centers, female personal protective equipments, flexi working hours, weekend leaves etc.

If the facility in organization level is improved then every working woman can prove her metal in the organization. Some of the banking companies in our country have implemented many of the feminine benefits that have resulted to the increase in share of women in banking sector in the country.

About half of India's banking assets are under the control of women, economist **Ajit Ranade** had said last year "when India's largest bank STATE BANK OF INDIA got its first woman chief Arundhati Bhattacharya. In India when gender bias against women is rampant, India's top banks are headed by women- SBI CMD Arundhati Bhattacharya, ICICI bank's Chanda Kochar, Axis Bank Shikha Sharma, Bank of India Vijaylakshmi Iyer and Allahabad Bank Shubhalakshmi Panse. Recently India opened its first all women bank Bhartiye Mahila Bank, headed by Usha Ananthasubramaniam. Howbeit these expostulations, the number of women in workplace has remained low. In an effort to increase gender diversity and includes more women, banks such as SBI, ICICI bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank are making their workplace more women friendly."(**The Hindu- Business Line, March 10, 2014**)

The following are the steps taken by various banks for feminist empowerment:-

ICICI Bank:-

ICICI bank's initiative **SAATH AAPKA** listed policy design to help and support women employees at different life stages. The bank provides an environment to women employees especially after child birth, ensuring there is no discrimination during performance appraisal against women on account of maternity or otherwise for career progression in the organization. The company set up complimentary system and processes that are aligned to provide immediate help and support to women employee during their daily commute to office, the security protocol and quick response team established by the bank are few step in this direction. Women's participation in organization can be enhanced by providing the safe and secure working environment. For this purpose, bank has appointed 30 relationships manager who visit branch location twice a year and meet the employees to understand their problem. Last year, the bank initiated a series of measures for its women employees, including self defense training, travel monitoring for women working late at night and quick reaction mobile vans to handle emergency situation. The bank discourages late working of women employees. In case of an emergency, where a woman employee is required to stay late at night, the concerned department is required to

arrange a vehicle in which a male colleague has to compulsorily accompany the woman employee to ensure safe drop/pick up.

“Childbirth and childcare are the biggest career obstacles a woman between 28 and 35 years of age goes through. Organizations should be able to support women in these critical phases, else everything they do is lip service,” says **K Ramkumar**, executive director, ICICI Bank. The bank provides its employees a unique basket leave.

Maternity benefits: can be extended by taking without pay on a need basis.

Child care leave: 36 days available each year for mothers and single fathers till the child attain the age to 2 years.

Fertility leave: 180 days, for employees seeking to undergo treatment for fertility.

Adoption leave: To support an adoptive parent, 36days of paid leave each year is available for women employees and single fathers.

SBI:-

Country’s largest bank SBI, also allowed its women staffers more flexibility by extending a 2 year sabbatical from work for the purpose such as children’s education and taking care of elderly parents/in laws.

Kotak Mahindra Bank:-

In February 2014, bank introduced an all women probationary officer courses. In the last 3 years, the number of women in Kotak has doubled to 18-20% of the workforce from 9-10%. The bank wants to increase to 30%. **Shanti Enkambaram**, Kotak bank’s president of corporate and investment banking, said “society and organization should work together to prevent the drop outs on the journey from education to employment, and from marriage to motherhood to the second innings. For this, the bank has launched a unique second inning program to attract such women.”

Citi India:-

1. Women can avail of their maternity leaves in tranches.
2. Performance rating strategies for securing ratings of women professionals at the time of maternity leave.

HSBC:-

1. Leave without pay up to 4 months.
2. Maternity cover option to find temporary replacement for new mothers.
3. Counseling sessions to new mothers.

Standard Charter:-

1. Day care centre's at New Delhi and Mumbai called 'colors of joy'
2. Sabbaticals for women employees. **(The Economic Times, June 8, 2013)**

TCS:-

In recent years, the company has launched "Diversity In Women's Network Initiatives" that encourages women employee to stick to their job despite the pressure from marriage, family and maternity demands and attain sustainable career at long term.

The organizations are the main facilitator and promoter for employees' development as with the case of Chanda Kochar, CEO of ICICI bank; if the organization would have not supported and encouraged her she could not have been so successful in her career as she started her career as a management trainee and within a short span of time she became the CEO of the company.

CONCLUSION:-

The above mentioned feminine benefits would definitely help a working woman in proving her efficiency and utilizing her optimum potential in the organization making her the most important asset of the organization. If a person is free from the bondages of society, family and work environment pressure then only he/she can be creative or innovate new ideas which can be beneficial for the organization. Like a bird is unable to fly unless and it is kept in a cage and once it is set free after that no one can stop it from flying. This is same for a woman too. Sometimes because of the various socio cultural influences she is unable to manage everything simultaneously but everything is there in her mind, she starts losing her confidence which resultantly deteriorate her efficiency. But the fact is that she has a potential of managing infinite number of things simultaneously and give her best in every field.

According to Eleanor Roosevelt;

"A woman is like a tea bag- you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water."

Family members play the most important role especially the husbands who can encourage and respect their professional life. The **example can be cited of Mary Kom, without the support of her husband she could not achieve such glories in her life.** Women are the facilitator of social transformation and any organization, society or a country cannot think of its development unless and until the women of that country are not developed.

According to Amartya Sen;

"In the course of evolution of women's movement, women are not passive recipient of welfare enhancing help brought about society but are the active promoters and facilitators of social transformation. Such transformation influence the lives and well being of women, but also those of men and children-boys as well as girls. This momentous enrichment of the reach of women's movement."

SUGGESTION:-

The working women in India can become more efficient if the organization includes the following feminine benefits:-

1. Leadership development program should be introduced especially for the women employees.
2. To build confidence among the women employees decision making job should be encouraged instead of allocating routine activities as women are favored in routine activities.
3. The above mentioned facilities which are named as special facilities by the organization should be considered as the basic facilities as it is the need of the day as if these facilities are provided then the women employee can become more creative and efficient. If the efficiency of the woman reduces that will ultimately hamper the growth of the organization as a woman constitute a considerable portion in the organization. An organization cannot think of a human resource development unless it empowers the women employees of its organization.
4. There should be second inning program in every organization as it is in Kotak Mahindra to attract women who have left their job due to marriage, family commitments and other traditional role. The organization should introduce programs and counseling sessions for such women to build their confidence and should be placed in that position in which they left earlier.

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