

EFFICACY OF WOMEN WELFARE AND EMPOWERMENT POLICIES: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO INDIAN RAILWAYS

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Abstract: Women are the most respected creation of the God and are the center around which entire universe revolves. They account for nearly 49.55% of the world population which is around 7,486,520,598 as on 1.1.2017.

Nearly, 40% of the women population constitutes the working women. So far as India is concerned nearly 25% of the women are working women, who are employed either in a formal or non- formal sector and gets paid for the work done.

Empowerment provides a greater access to knowledge and resources, more independence in decision making, considerable ability to plan lives, more control over the circumstances which influence lives. Thus, women empowerment is a process in which women try to re-align the existing norms to effectively promote their well being

Working women have the dual responsibility of managing the family as well as work place responsibilities. For playing the dual role it is important that they maintain sound health and remain physically as well as mentally fit and feel safe and secured at work place. Thus, a safe, conducive, congenial and women friendly environment as well as women welfare policies at work place are very important which makes them feel that they are a part of the organization and fully taken care of and which ultimately effects their family's happiness and helps in building a positive environment at home .

Indian railways are the largest Government as well as commercial undertaking with 1308323 employees as on 31.3.2017 and out of this 91284 women employees are working in this organization. Thus, welfare, safety, security and happiness of these women employees is very vital not only for the productivity and efficiency of IR but also for their family's health and happiness.

The present study aims to assess the women welfare and empowerment policies of Indian Railways.

Keywords: Women, Working-Women, Women Welfare Policies, Women Empowerment, Indian Railways.

Introduction: WOMEN in ancient India enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. Rigveda suggest that women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own husbands(swayamvar system). Women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However in approximately 500 B.C., the status of women began to decline, and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and Christianity later worsened women's freedom and rights. Although reform movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to religious orders, by and large women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started around the sixth century. The Bhakti movements tried to restore women's status and questioned certain forms of oppression. Traditions such as Sati, Jauhar, and Devadasi among some communities have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some instances of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practiced by Indian women in some communities. Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them¹. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law;

prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard¹.

Therefore, it is mandatory for every government and private organization in India to ensure the compliance of women empowerment⁸ and welfare policies which protect and promote the rights of women employees. Indian railways which are having 91284 women employees as on 31.03.2017² cannot be an exception to this. Moreover, women empowerment and welfare has been in the center of IR policies right from beginning and is making all out efforts to ensure the same through its various policy guidelines and directives.

Keeping in mind the above aspect, an attempt has been made by the author to study the various women welfare and empowerment policies in IR.

Methodology: A study of secondary data comprising of various pay commission reports, Railway codes and Manuals Annual reports and accounts, policy directives of IR has been done.

Findings and discussion: it has been noticed that women empowerment and welfare has remained in the centre of policy making of IR right from 1st Pay commission³, which clearly states that there should be no discrimination on the basis of cast, creed and gender among employees in IR. And the successive pay commissions⁴ also continued the same and addressed the women welfare and empowerment related issues to the maximum extent and thus helping in creation of a safe, congenial, conducive and women friendly environment for the working women. A detailed brief of various women welfare and empowerment policies of IR is placed below in tabular form for a better understanding.

Sr. No	Women Empowerment /Welfare Policies	Details
1	Maternity leave⁵	A female Railway employee including an apprentice with less than 2 surviving children can be granted a maternity leave for 180 days. Maternity leave may be combined with leave of any other kind. Notwithstanding the provision in sub-rule 527 up to two years in continuation to maternity leave, without the production of medical certificate. Leave in further continuation of leave granted under clause (b) of sub-rule (3) may be granted on production of a medical certificate for the illness of the railway servant or of the newly born baby, subject to production of medical certificate. The period of maternity leave on account of miscarriage / abortion is restricted to 45 days in the entire service of the female railway servant.
2	Child Adoption Leave	An adoptive mother on the railways with less than two surviving children may be granted leave of 180 days (*) as 'Child Adoption Leave' on adoption of a child up to one year of age, on the lines of maternity leave admissible to natural mothers. In continuation of 'Child Adoption Leave', the adoptive mothers may also be granted, if applied for, leave of the kind due and admissible for a period up to one year reduced by the age of the adopted child on the date of legal adoption without taking into account the period of Child Adoption Leave
3	Child care leave⁶	Introduced w.e.f. 01-09-2008 (6th CPC Recommendations) Women employees having minor children maybe granted Child Care

		<p>Leave for a maximum period of two years (i.e.730 days) during their entire service for taking care of up to two eldest surviving children upto their attaining the age of 18 years whether for rearing or to look after any of their needs like examination,Sickness etc..</p> <p>The employees shall be paid leave salary equal to the paydrawn immediately before proceeding on leave.</p> <p>No difference between adoptive mother and biological mothers to grant CCL.</p>
4	Children with disability – CCL ⁶	Female Railway employees having children with disability up to 40% and mentally retarded children,can avail CCL for a maximum period of two years [730days] till the children attains the age of 22 years,subject to the other terms and conditions stipulated as in normal cases.
5	Special casual leave-family planning	To encourage small family norms, both male and female railway employees are granted special casual leave for family planning operations as per leave rules.
6	Special allowance for child care for women with disability ⁶	<p>For empowerment of disabled women,Women with disabilities(40%as elaborated in Ministry of Welfare's Notification No. 16-18/97-NI.I dated 01.06.2001)shall be paid Rs.1000/-(*)per month as Special Allowance for Child Care. The allowance shall be payable from the time of the child's birth till the child is two years old.</p> <p>(*) Revised from time to time as below</p> <p>Special Allowance for child care for women with Disabilities w.e.f. 01.09.08 Rs. 1000/- Per Month per child w.e.f. 01.01.11 Rs. 1250/-w.e.f. 01.01.14 Rs. 1500/-</p> <p>[ii] It shall be payable for a maximum of two children.</p>
7	Family pension and Fixed medical allowance	<p><i>Family Pension to widowed / divorced daughters: -</i></p> <p>In general family pension shall be paid to daughters up to 25 years of age or till married whichever is earlier, but the benefit of family pension has been extended to widowed/ divorced daughters beyond 25 years of age subject to fulfillment of all other conditions prescribed in the case of son / daughter. The names of divorced or widowed daughter can be included even after issue of PPO s-</p> <p>In the case of family pension to parents, the mother will be first given preference for payment of family Pension.</p> <p>The childless widow of a deceased Central Government employee shall be eligible for family pension from 01.01.2006, after remarriage too.</p> <p>Widowed / Divorced / Unmarried Daughters in receipt of family pension being family pensioner are already covered by relevant instructions and are extended benefit of grant of FMA provided they fulfill all other terms and conditions in this regard and become eligible from the same date from which they become eligible for family pension.</p>
8	Waiver of Exam fee/ Posts in CG Waiver of examination fee for women candidates:	The examination fee for women candidates and candidates belonging to minorities and economically backward classes is waived off.
9	Age relaxation for widows/ divorced women	Upper age limit in the case of widows, divorced women and women judicially separated from their husbands, who are not remarried, shall be relaxed up to the age 35 years for General category and 38

	in open market & on Compassionate Grounds	years for OBC and up to 40 years for SC/ ST candidates has been provided. Para 115 (v) of IREM Vol.I&(Bd'slr No. E (NG) II/ 2000/ RR-I/ 37 Dt.10/8/2001)
10	Compassionate appointment - Posts earmarked for illiterate widows: -	With a view to accommodate illiterate widows, the Ministry stipulated that the following posts should be reserved exclusively for the appointment of widows: [i] Water Woman. [ii] Hospital Ayah / Attendant (Female). [iii] Cinder-picking Woman. [iv] Sweeper Woman. [v] C&W Khalasis (for waste packing only). [vi] Retiring Room Attendants. [vi] Ayah and Female Sanitary Cleaner in Railway Hospitals and Railway Schools. [vii] Server in Catering Department. [viii] A percentage of vacancies of Office Peons (Percentage to be decided by the Railways). [ix] Khalasis attached to Sub-Divisional Offices e.g., AEN's APWI's etc.
11	Lady members in selection Committee	[i] Every selection committee where selection is made for 10 or more than 10 vacancies and lady candidates are expected, it is mandatory to have a lady member, so that women candidate can feel comfortable.. [ii] In the event of women officer not being available in the Ministry / Department itself, a lady officer from any other office at the same station should be nominated.
12	Posting of Husband & wife at the same station	All out efforts are made to post the husband and wife at the same station. A separate register is maintained at each Divisional and Zonal headquarters of the Railways for registering requests for transfers of railway servants for posting at the place of their spouses.
13	Hostel facilities for single women Railway Employees ⁸	The Board has decided that the single women Railway Employees may be provided with hostel facilities at all Divisional Headquarters by making appropriate arrangement without any pay scale restrictions.
14	Creche facilities	To ease the pressure of the working mothers regarding the care of children, Creches have been provided in Divisional headquarters, Zones, PRS centres and Hospitals etc. to give conducive environment to working women.
15	Toilets , restrooms	Separate toilets, Restrooms, Rest houses etc. are being provided in working areas, major stations for women employees.
16	Staff benefit fund ⁷	A large number of staff welfare activities with special outlay on women welfare activities are financed through this SBF on each zonal railway. Women welfare activities mean scholarship to girl child for higher education and other women empowerment activities. Women welfare committees at Zonal, Divisional and Railway board level also help the female members of the employees' family in enhancing the family income by teaching vocational skills like stitching, handicrafts, weaving, beauty culture etc. and help in being self- reliant. Every year per capita 800 Rs based on the working strength of Railway employees is credited to staff benefit fund maintained at each Zonal railway and fund is used for financing various staff welfare activities stated above.
17	Women welfare	Women welfare organizations comprising of the wives of Railway

	organisations ⁷	officers play a unique proactive role in the area of women empowerment by running Nursery schools for children of Railway employees, schools and crèches for mentally challenged children of Railway employees, providing financial assistance in deserving cases and handicraft centers for female Railway employees.
18	Amenities to women passengers	<p>Railways have earmarked quota of 4 berths/coach in sleeper class, 2 berths /coach in 2AC & 3AC for senior citizens, female passengers of age 45 years and above and pregnant women in all mail express trains and an unreserved ladies coach near guard van in all the trains is provided.</p> <p>In metro cities, where EMUs run, separate 1st and 2nd class ladies coaches are provided and same are escorted by RPF personnel to provide safety and security to women passengers. Apart from these ladies special locals are run in major metro cities like Mumbai, Chennai etc.</p> <p>For having representations of women in force 10% of all the posts in the rank of SI and constables are earmarked to be filled by women.</p> <p>In almost all zones Mahila Vahinies have been created which ensure the safety and security of women passengers.</p>
19	Committee for prevention of Sexual harassment of women at work place	Based on the detailed guidelines issued by hon'ble Supreme court in case of Visakha VS State of Rajasthan in the case of sexual harassment of women at work place, internal complaints committees to look into SHWW cases have been formed in all the Zonal railways and their units and committees have been given the powers of Inquiry officers and a strict monitoring of the functioning of the committee is being ensured by apex level by way of mandatory submission of annual returns to Railway board clearly showing the performance of the committees and progress and efficacy of the justice delivery system of SHWW cases. Railway servant Conduct rules and Discipline and Appeal rules have been modified to align with the SHWW guidelines. This has uniquely provided a platform to women employees to voice their grievances relating to Sexual harassment and also a prompt redressal system has not only gave them the courage to stand against the evil but also boldly face the world like a really empowered women.

Conclusion: It can be seen from the above table that IR is committed for providing a safe, conducive, congenial and women friendly environment to not only its women employees but also to its esteemed women passengers. Moreover women empowerment and welfare policies are being implemented on IR with an iron hand and also policy wing of IR is continuously working hard to modify and update the women welfare and empowerment policies with the changing global scenario.

Suggestions and Recommendations: there is always a room for development and accordingly author submits the following suggestions:

- a) The benefit of Maternity leave and child care leave should be extended to surrogate mothers also.
- b) The facility of flexi office hours and work from home facility be provided to women employees who are on CCL and other types of leave including young employees who are pursuing higher education and their pay should be regulated accordingly. This will result in increased output.

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