



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES OF WOMEN LAWYERS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Women in judiciary are playing significant role in sensitizing gender issues legally. When the participation of women in legal profession is analysed, it is found that, lesser number (about 5%) of women lawyers compared to major portion of men lawyers (95%) in India. Major reasons for such lesser participation of women in legal practice include difficulty of women to look after their families due to their profession leading to role conflict, gender discrimination in legal profession, unequal pay, preference of men lawyers by clients and so on. The paper has thrown light on the socio-economic and professional issues of women lawyers in India.



KEYWORDS: Women Lawyers, Judiciary, India..

INTRODUCTION

Women in judiciary can play an important role in sensitizing the judicial system towards gender issues. As the incidence of crimes against women is increasing, there is need to strengthen the judicial system by appointing more women judges and participation of more women lawyers to deal with issues relating to women and the family. The Indian Constitution emphasize gender equality and there is need for equal participation of women in every occupation and profession and thus, women lawyers are playing important role in judiciary.

The entry of women in to the legal profession relates back to 18th Century. The legal history shows that in the United States Myra Brandwell fought her case right up to supreme Court and lost in 1872. Anna Chandy from Kerala became India's first woman judge in 1937 (Pavithra, et al, 2018). Justice Smt. Sujata Vasant Manohar was the first lady to be elevated as a Judge on the bench of Bombay High Court. Justice Leila Seth was the Chief Justice of Himachal High Court, and Justice Fathima Beevi was Judge of Kerala High Court. She was the first woman to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court of India in 1989. Some of the well-known women judges in India are Justice K. K. Usha, Justice Fathima Beevi, Justice Sujata Vasant Manohar, Justice Sunanda Bhandare, Justice Leila Seth and others.

Mishra (2015) has furnished the statistics in growth of women in the legal profession from 1962 to 2005. It revealed that, there were total 1,36,635 registered legal practitioners, of which only 4,265 (3.12%) were women. The number of total registered legal practitioners has been increased to

2,28,144 and the number of women law practitioners has also been increased to 11,611 between 1962 to 2005.

Women's participation in legal profession in the state still remained at a low level, and saw a noticeable increase only during the last decade of the twenty-first century. This change in the configuration of the profession brought many issues to the fore, including modernity, professional mobility and income inequality. The lower participation of women in judiciary is due to gender inequality, male dominance in profession, pay inequality, discrimination, role conflict and so on.

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When the nature of professional work of lawyers is analysed, it is found that, before registration of every case, it is essential for them to study. Based on the same, it is essential to plan for the arguments and counter-arguments in the court. More time for studying different legal provisions and case studies is essential for the lawyers. It is difficult for women to dedicate more time to prepare for the cases as they are also compelled to do their domestic duties. The biggest challenge for women lawyers across countries and types of legal practice is undoubtedly balancing their domestic duties with their professional demands. While it can be said that balancing their homes and work is a challenge for women in all professions given that the burden of domestic duties invariably falls on the woman, what makes it especially challenging is the fact that the legal system is engineered from the point of view of men (Kannan, 2013).

Social barriers prevent women to enter the legal profession and to enter the court premises as litigants or citizens claiming rights. As the women lawyers are always busy in preparation and pleading the cases, to a greater extent, they are unable to give much attention to their families. Further, they are also find it difficult to participate in socio-cultural and religious festivals and celebrations due to lack of time. As such, most of the women lawyers are facing psychological problems such as stress and tension.

Due to increase in number of lawyers, there is competition faced by women lawyers. In legal profession, there is more gender discrimination compared to other professions. Except women and family cases, women lawyers are not preferred by people to file their cases. It is also one of the major setbacks faced by women lawyers. There is discrimination in payment of fees by clients and women lawyers are getting lesser fees compared to men lawyers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

From the above discussion, it is clear that, legal profession is the only profession, where there is lower participation of women leading gender inequality. The reasons for lesser participation include gender discrimination, inequality, harassment, preference of men lawyers, difficulty of women lawyers to look after both professional work as well as domestic duties, and so on. To increase the participation of women, there is need for reservation of women lawyers in every court.

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