

Challenges for women in Indian hotel industry: w.s.r.t. unorganized hotels**Rajiv Kumar Dwivedi¹,**

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Abstract

The paper aims to understand the different challenges faced by women in Indian hotel industry with special reference to unorganized small budget hotels. The reason for giving special emphasis to unorganized small hotel industry of India is because it contributes to more than 70% of the total Indian hotel industry. Also the challenges for women workforce in unorganized small hotel industry of India are more intense and serious as compared to organized hotel industry. Also it is the need of the hour to address this issue as this is hampering the growth of Indian hotel industry as well as it is hindering the growth of women in this industry also and a synergy is missing.

Keywords - Women workforce, Indian hotel industry, unorganized, synergy

Introduction

The Tourism, hospitality & hotel Industry is mainly male dominated, especially at higher and middle management positions. To a big extent hotel people agree and scholarly literature also supports that in hotel industry, women are recruited to do some what semi or unskilled, low paid, front office and non managerial jobs. (Biswas and Cassell, 1996 and Davies, Taylor and Savery, 2001) The role of women in Hotel Industry is not discussed or taken seriously. It is because of lot of challenges which this gender faces in this industry, unlike other industries and thus either women are not able to or given the lead roles in hotels. The major challenges or hurdles for women to go to higher positions in hotel industry are cultural, social and industry specific barrier. Although researchers and stake holders of hotel industry agree that there is a definite role of women at certain places/positions in hotel industry. Now talking about Indian hotel industry the turnover is around 45 billion \$ (2015) out of which 70% is contributed by unorganized small or budget hotels. Indian hotel industry contributes

to more than 10% to Indian GDP & is growing fast. The paper focuses on this 70% unorganized small hotels and tries to find out the challenges of women workforce in this particular segment. Unlike the Global scenario, the Indian scenario is different and the challenges for women workforce are also different because of different social, cultural and economic factors.

Review of Literature

Mostly the literature agrees upon that women are not recruited for jobs like Bell boys, night watch or night porters. (Biswas and Cassell, 1996). Also women normally hold low skill and low paid positions due to recruitment and selection process and formal and informal policies. However the importance of women workforce in hotel industry is put forward by researchers (Li & Leung 2001) who state that the role women at management positions in Indian hotel industry in future is considerable. (Wong and Chung, 2003; Timo & Davidson, 2005) state that when it comes to management positions, the jobs are dominated by men. (Liu and Wilson, 2001) have strongly put forward that females are much more determined as compared to their male counterparts and they are more democratic and this approach of theirs, increase staff commitment.

The different challenges that women workforce face in hotel industry with special reference to Indian hotel industry are as follows

Safety & Security Issues

One of the biggest challenges for women in hotel industry, specially unorganized small hotels is safety, security & sexual harassment because of long working hours, night shifts and male domination. The safety and security of women workforce is a question mark in hotel industry. In case women are employed in jobs like food & beverage, housekeeping & room service (where normally they do not prefer to work) then the instances of sexual harassment or unwelcome advances may increase. Also in hospitality industry majority of the business get together or social get together take place late evening. Also in India working in hotel industry for women is seen as a social taboo. This poses a threat to the women workforce, if they are the part of food & beverage or event management team. Research also proves that sexual harassment is more common in hotel industry than elsewhere (Woodsand Kavanaugh 1994). Because of this challenge there is a threat to the growth of women in hotel industry as well as the attrition of women increases which is neither good for hotel industry nor for the society.

Work Life Balance

Work life balance also is a big challenge for women workforce in Indian hotel industry. In Indian society women share a bigger responsibility of taking care of house as well as taking care of the small kids. Now because of the long working hours, women face a challenge of managing house (Personal life) and professional life. Now in case she falls in the child care stage of her life cycle, the challenge is a bigger challenge. Getting a maternity leave or child care leave in a relatively small hotel is a distant dream unlike government sector. Also unlike information technology (IT) industry or information technology enabled services (ITES), flexi hour working can create other problems like late evening or late night working which is neither good for lady not the hotel prefers. Also unorganized small hotels take pregnant ladies or ladies with small kids as a liability. Hotel industry also lacks the culture of having crush for small babies of working women.

Women are not preferred at senior positions

Women not only in Indian hotel industry but in global hotel industry also are not considered at higher or manager positions. There are very less women in board rooms in large size star hotels or at top management positions. One of the reasons for this is that the top management does not have faith in the women workforce that they can handle higher responsibilities. One of the research says that both male & female (69%) think that front office is the most preferred position/department for women in hotel industry (M. Chaudhary & M. Gupta, 2010). One of the reason that hotel management believes that women can't handle higher responsibilities is that they are highly involved with child care & family responsibilities. Women are given work based on their physical looks rather than intellectual

calibre. They are normally considered suitable for & kept for visual positions. Because of this very reason women's contribution in Indian hotel industry is limited and this restricts the growth of women in Indian hotel industry.

Young & Unmarried Women Preferred

Although it may seem to be unfair & unethical but hotel industry across the globe prefers young & unmarried women (mainly under 30). It may be because of the operational set up of a hotel or because of the past trend. Young & energetic women add up to building the image of a hotel & help in the promotion of the hotel. The reason of preferring unmarried women is that they do not have responsibility of family & childcare and the hotel is free from these liabilities (the liabilities of maternity leave, child care and early time off's). As per a research 57% female like to continue in their jobs/ careers where as 88.2% males prefer to continue. This data is of organized sector of hotel industry where as in case of unorganized small hotel segment the percentage may be less than half of it.

Men feel uncomfortable working under women

Specially in hotel industry & other wise also men normally feel uncomfortable working under a women in hotel industry. The reasons are that:

- Men doubt the potential of women that they can handle difficult physical tasks.
- Men doubt that women can't handle higher leadership positions.
- Normally men think that women are not serious for their career in hotel industry.
- Because of family responsibilities that women undertake, men think that they are not long term players.

Few of the other small but relevant challenges are:

Unsupportive male supervisors

In hotel industry it is observed that male supervisors normally do not support female staff. Male supervisors are normally insensitive towards female co workers and don't help, support or cooperate them on the issues of mutual interest. There are in tangible barriers based on personal bias & unsaid organizational culture which does not support women in their carrier advancement.

Customer create more problem for women staff

There is a close relationship of customers with the hotel staff. Since majority of the hotels keep female staff at reception so there is an inevitable encounter between the customers & hotel staff. It is observed that customers knowingly or unknowingly create lot of problems for the female staff. One of the reasons could be that they normally don't have confidence in the female staff that they can handle difficult jobs.

Women have to put extra efforts to prove themselves

Women have to put extra efforts to prove themselves as compared to men and this particular fact is supported by many research literatures. Normally they have to prove themselves to get career advancements.

Higher management does not take women staff seriously

One of the unsaid challenges for women staff in Indian hotel industry is that the higher management & stake holders do not take the women work force seriously. This is in spite of the fact that women are considered to be more serious and determined for their tasks. Because of this biased behaviour of the top management, women face problems in career planning & advancement.

Conclusion and discussion

As we have seen in this paper which is supported by researchers across the world that women workforce of hotel industry face lot of challenges and problems that restrict them towards their career advancement in spite of the fact that they are hardworking, dedicated, sincere and progressive. The different challenges for women in hotel industry are safety and security issue, work life balance issues, women not preferred at senior positions (because of lot of reasons), preference for young and unmarried women, men feel uncomfortable working under women, unsupportive male supervisors, customers create more problems for women staff and higher management and stake holders do not take them seriously. The challenges are more intense for Indian hotel industry which is dominated by unorganized small budget hotels. These all problems have to be addressed by all the stake holders (Hotels, Government, hotel associations) so that women get an opportunity to prove themselves in this industry also and add up to the growth and success of Indian hotel industry.

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