WORKING CONDITIONS OF IT PROFESSIONALS IN KERALA: A STUDY BASED ON SELECT FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Dr Dhanya M
Assistant Professor of Economics, HHMSPB NSS College for Women, Neeramankara, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
Dr. Krishnakumar R
Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

ABSTRACT

There is tremendous scope for employment and career opportunities in IT sector. IT has opened up immense career possibilities for the educated and urban Indian women. IT provides equal opportunity for men and women, minorities and handicapped. Another prominent feature is the number of women professionals are increasing. The advent of IT can change the concept of work, especially for women. Now women are occupying a prominent position in IT and their numbers are increasing. The newly emerging trends like flexi timings and work at home will attract more women to this sector. This encourages women to take up professional courses that promised secure careers. The most promising jobs available to young, urban , educated women is in Information technology. The valid criticism is that such jobs exploit young Indians who have a degree of their own. In IT sector, many are under-utilizing higher education qualifications and doing low-level work. Many of the jobs are stressful, monotonous, hazardous to health and subject to heavy surveillance, although masked with a charming exterior. Although   the IT sector jobs have changed the structure of career opportunities for educated young people, there are several objections to this kind of jobs. One is that these jobs exploit and demean people.. The present study reveals that employees lack most of their fundamental rights.

KEYWORDS: Fundamental rights, Information Technology,

INTRODUCTION

Information Technology is the world's fastest growing economic activity. As an industry, Information Technology has revolutionized the world as never before and it occupies a strategic place in Indian economy. Information Technology is integrated with every sphere of life and becomes an essential ingredient in modern education. In IT sector, there is tremendous scope for employment and career opportunities, but it offers new types of challenging careers in different work environment. As the emphasis is on intellectual rather than physical resources, the IT sector is considered to be non-discriminating. There is equal opportunity for men and women, minorities and handicapped, all alike. Now women occupy a prominent position in IT labour force. IT has become the career option for many young educated Indians.

The fundamental rights were included in the constitution because they were considered essential for the development of the personality of every individual and to preserve human dignity. These fundamental rights help not only in protection but also the prevention of gross violations of human rights. They emphasise on the fundamental unity of India by guaranteeing to all citizens the access and use of the same facilities, irrespective of background. Amongst several means of action by the ILO to promote a floor of social rights, is the campaign to promote fundamental principles and rights at work and the universal ratification of the eight ILO Conventions covering these principles and rights. The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, adopted in 1998, aims to ensure that social progress goes hand in hand with economic progress and development. It covers four principles and rights:

India's image has been transformed from a slow moving bureaucratic economy to global player of world class technology. Knowledge based economy of India has changed the country to a fast moving employment generator. The development experience of Kerala received much international acclaim due to its unique pattern of development. High level of social development in Kerala is disproportionate to its low GDP growth. Kerala is a state characterized by low capital formation, limited or poor prospects of the manufacturing sector, high unemployment, brain drain, the severe threats faced by agricultural and traditional sectors and the uncertainties faced by expatriate employment in the Gulf. Educated unemployment is another serious issue in Kerala Economy. Productive employment of youth is an essential factor for economic development. Unemployment Rate in youth in Kerala is much higher than the overall population and it reveals the severity of unemployment problem among the youth in Kerala.

In this context, in Kerala, IT sector is considered as a huge hope, engine of growth and a huge push to the state's economy. It has been recognized as the core competency sector in GDP, exports, foreign exchange earnings, revenue and employment generation. Increase in salary and difference in work environment attract more professionals to IT sector even at their younger age. Therefore the conditions of IT sector in order to decipher the

quality of employment in IT sectors is important. The concept of work life balance has become redundant. Today, it's all about 'blending' and not 'balancing 'the personal with the professional. The past 20 years have seen extraordinary changes in our workplaces and families. Women have entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers and improved their earnings relative to men. Today working women in India are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitment to homes. Working women are juggling between multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, in managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. The changing phenomenon increasing anxiety among working women where they have to manage the chucks of their family and work and need to strike a balance between their work life and the personal life.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

IT sector has immense potential for generating employment without exerting much pressure on land and the environment. Hence, it has been considered as an ideal industry for Kerala and conscious efforts have been undertaken to promote IT sector within Kerala. Employment in IT sector is often considered as very prestigious and highly remunerative. IT sector is characterized by long working hours, deadlines for projects, overtime work, lack of enjoyment facilities etc. This adversely affects IT professionals resulting in work-life imbalance, disturbances in family life and different types of health issues. However, a close examination of the nature of employment in IT sector reveals that the quality of working conditions is questionable and working environment that prevails in IT sector be short of basic fundamental rights.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is designed with the following main objectives.
1. To examine the employment pattern of IT sector compared to other traditional sectors in Kerala.
2. To study the working conditions of IT professionals in Thiruvananthapuram district based on select fundamental rights.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For conducting the study, both secondary and primary data were used. Relevant secondary data were collected from journals, brochures, other research publications and official websites of NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India (GOI), Government of Kerala (GOK), STPI (Software Technology Parks of India) and Technopark, Thiruvananthapuram.

Primary data was used to understand the work-life balance of IT professionals in Thiruvananthapuram district. Relevant information was collected from 300 IT professionals working in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala with the help of a structured interview schedule. For analysing primary data suitable statistical techniques like percentage was used.

1.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

EMPLOYMENT PATTERN IN IT SECTOR

IT sector is a highly internationalized sector that has intensified the globalization of the Indian economy, besides significantly contributing to economic growth. Work in the IT industry is characterized by a number of distinctive labour market features such as flexible working schedules, firm project deadlines and influential foreign clients, frequently in different time zones from the service provider, as well as customized support and maintenance. Work in an IT company tends to be less laborious in a physical sense and can be more intellectual in nature. But it has many specific features that may have adverse effects: long working hours, flexibility in work, volatile business conditions, high client dependency, work-life imbalance, higher remuneration but a high attrition rate. These are all some of the common notions about work life in IT companies. Today it promotes opportunities of men and women to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. Technically qualified youth as well as the general public perceive employment in IT industry as highly remunerative, productive, stable and safe and as a key to secure future. Today IT industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of Indian economy and has been increasingly contributing to India's GDP and export revenues. IT industry holds a promising future for the younger and technically skilled generation.

Majority (81.5 percent) of the IT professionals are in the age group between 22 to 30 years and the mean age of the employees is 26 years (Jobs with justice, 2012). The unfavorable media coverage on 'night shift' is causing social problems for the IT professionals. These younger generation workers are techno-savvy, aware of market realities and opportunities, they in general have a different mindset towards job and career. Factors like lack of advancement

in career, high workload, employee morale, risk involved in decision making, and organization climate leads to stress among them (Viven, 2010). They have high aspirations for career, expectations from job and are ready to take risk. Salary, like other sectors, is still one of the prime drivers for switching jobs. The average starting compensation to IT professional in India is around Rs. 15,000 per month, which is high compared to other sectors.

The workforce in IT faces its unique challenges. Work-related stress is currently one of the greatest challenges to the health of working people and to the healthiness of their work organizations. The IT industry in India brought a new work environment and sea changes in the employment trends. Service providers characterized this sector by adhering to strict deadlines set by their customers, working in different time zones, interdependency in teams, multitasking, increased interaction with offshore clients and extended work hours. IT professionals are constantly under pressure to deliver the services efficiently as well as to remain cost effective.
These working conditions lead to high stress in the professionals.

This sector is very volatile and faces the problem of lack of job security and constant   up gradation of skills to remain marketable. The skills in this sector are becoming obsolete at a rate of 20 percent per year. Stress is the worst hazard of their workplace and repetitive strain as the next greatest problem. The working conditions in the IT profession is becoming very stressful with average working hours extended to 50 hours per week, working on Saturdays and Sundays and not being able to take leave when sick. Increased workload, constant changes at work, reduced staff and long working hours affect not only employees but also the employers. The widespread nature of stress in IT has given rise to the term 'techno-stress'.

In IT industry, career development takes place through hard work, training, application and continuity in learning. Even though, women employed in IT belong to the younger age group, the majority of women quit from the job due to the problem of work life imbalance. At this age, women's responsibility at home is at its highest and there is a clash between home responsibilities and career development. This industry also requires long hours of work. In IT field, it is necessary to have continuous training for upgradation of skills, if once they have burn out of the labour market for some time find their skills obsolete. Although men and women started on an equal footing, women had slower career progress as compared to men. Fewer women had fast track careers as compared to men.

Work-life balance is an important and nowadays, this has become a serious issue. There is a drastic change in the nature of work and work environment and this makes an imbalance in work-life. This leads to dissatisfaction and disappointment among employees and it will negatively affect their mental and physical well-being and also career development. Since the employees have to work for long hours at workplace, they get only less time to spend in family. Due to these imbalances, most of highly qualified women quit from job after starting a family.

Even though, IT employees enjoy all most modern facilities and work is physically risk free but working longer hours, stress due to deadline pressures, satisfying their clients and lack of leisure and physical exercises negatively affect the mental well-being of employees. This may lead to more health issues like backaches, eye strain, cervical spondylitis, insomnia and depression. This may cause the work-life imbalance of professionals. The flexi-time work culture in IT sector also leads to long hours of work which negatively affects work-life balance of the employees. In IT sector, promotions and climbing of job ladder are entirely different from other sectors. There do not exist any standardized norms. Since promotions are purely based on employee's performance appraisal, they work hard and also maintain satisfactory client relationships, effective communication and service delivery, frequent overstays to ensure project completion just –in –time etc. This over work may disturb work-life balance of professional

Table 1.1
Work pattern in IT sector (Percentage)

Work Environment	Overall
Inadequate earnings	65.8
Longer working Hours	66.51
Monotonous work, tight deadlines, job stress, too much work pressures	46.72
Contractual employment relationship	49.72
Flexi-time work	80.29
Job insecurity	56.4
Absence of trade union& labour laws	35.89
Inadequate social security measures	32.22
High Client dependency	29.92
No rule bound job hierarchy	11.43
Wages tied to business cycles	16.32

Frequent travel abroad	7.38
Gender Discrimination	14.41
Over exploitation &Lack of leisure time	49.15
Health Problems	69.08

Source: Sample Survey

There is more work-life imbalance in IT sector. There is the problem of longer working hours in majority of companies because of the pressure of deadlines. Work at home is presented as an option, but it can be found as a way for exploitation than work at a fixed place. Increase in the suicide rates among professionals is a reflection of the problems in IT sector. Other entertainments are denied because of longer hours of work and this adds stress to the employees. Night shifts, Monotonous work and frequent journey to foreign countries are the other factors which disturb the family relationships of the employees. Frequent travel creates problems for working women due to their family ties.Night shifts and long working hours lead to frequent health problems and this may further aggravate the situation and the employee may be led to even states of depression.

There is job insecurity because of companies' policy of terminating their employees even though they are high in performance and excellence. Because of long experience, companies are forced to pay high salary. For avoiding this, owner companies lay off (terminate) their employees without any prior information. Companies are doubly benefitted by selecting youngsters for their firms. The youngsters are always low paid because of their lack of experience and the companies get more benefit from them because of their young age.
At the time of their recruitment, they have to sign bonds and these bonds become a chain for the employees. Bonds prevent employees from migrating to other companies within a stipulated period, so they have to suffer meekly even if there is discrimination.

Absence of Trade union and labour laws create serious problems since there is a lack of   an agency which hears complaints from employees. Married women face problems in protecting their children and home responsibilities along with their profession. This prevents them from showing excellence in their fields. They become poor performers and this affects their promotions and salary hikes.There is also the absence of social security measures like Pension and Provident Fund, which are high in Public than in Private sectors since majority of the new recruits are on contract basis.

CONCLUSION
The fundamental rights were included in the constitution because they were considered essential for the development of the personality of every individual and to preserve human dignity.Work- Life Balance determines the quality of a person's life and that may ultimately leads to the quality of a society. The perfect balance between life and work increase the quality of employment that may end up in producing better results. But, study revealed that in IT sector, the professionals were lacking many of their basic rights. Long working hours and flexi time are two key features of IT in private sector. Even though, the flexi time is treated as a convenient method for the employee, it actually becomes a reason for work –life imbalance. Demands of IT work that means necessity for promotion, target completion and satisfactory work client relation forces the employees to overstay in office that may ultimately lead to work-life imbalance. Along with long working hours, excessive work pressures and night shift negatively affect physical and mental health of employees of private sector. One of the major attractions of IT sector is the gender equality, but the study gives contrary information that there is gender discrimination at the work place.

REFERENCES
1.   Abhinav, Vijayasri,G.V. (2013).The Role of Information Technology of (IT) Industry in India, International Monthly Refereed Journal of Research In Management & Technology, Vol.2, ISSN – 2320-0073.
2.   Abraham & Sharma. (2005). New Technology and the Emerging Labour Market: A Study of Indian IT Industry. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics,* 48(4), 789-803.
3.   Agarwal, Ranjana.(2005). Women in the Digital Era: A Case Study of Career Patterns of Women Professionals in Information Technology, *Review of   Development   and Change*, 10(2), 152-166.
4.   Agarwal & Promila. (2011). Relationship between psychological contract & organizational commitment in Indian IT industry, The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations A Review of Economic & Social Development, Vol- 47, No.2.
5.   Agrawal, Narendra. et al. (2006). Leadership Challenges in Indian Software Industry, Leadership Challenges in Indian Software Industry, Indian Institute of Management,Bangalore. Working Paper No.249

6.   Agrawal, Narendra. (2000).Human Issues and challenges in Indian Software Industry, Working paper-152, Centre for Development Studies.

7.   Arun. et al.(2004). ICT Initiatives, Women and Work in Reinforcing or Changing Gender Inequalities in South India? Development Informatics, Working Paper Series ISBN: 190414358 X Paper No. 20, Institute for Development Policy and Management University of Manchester, Precinct Centre, Manchester.

8.   Banerjee, debdas. (2005). Knowledge Workers and Information Technology: Re-living Early English Industrial Revolution. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economic,*48(4), 777-787

9.   Beegom, Bushra. (2012). Stress Experienced by Women Managers in Kerala: A Sociological Analysis. *ISDA Journal,* 22(3), 233-251.

10. Clark, W. Alice & Sekher, T.V. (2007). Can Career – Minded Young women Reverse Gender Discrimination? A view from Bangalore's High–Tech Sector, Gender, Technology and Development, Vol.11. No. 3., Sage Publication New Delhi.

11. Choudhury, Rajashik, Roy and Gupta. (2011). Impact of Age on Pay Satisfaction and Job Satisfaction Leading to Turnover Intention: A Study of Young Working Professionals in India. Managemaent and Labour Studies, A Quarterly Journal devoted to Contemporary Issues in Business Management and Human resources, 36(4), 353-368.

12. Husain, Zakir & Dutta, Mousumi. (2008).Do Working women satisfice? A Study of Kolkata's IT Sector, The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 731-746.

13. Jain, Rajeswari. (2014). An Analysis of Income and Investment Pattern of Working Women in the City of Ahmedabad. *International Journal of Research in Management and Technology*, 4(6),138-146.

14. Rajesh, Saundarya., & Ekambaram, Karthik .(2013). The Career Trajectories of Indian women Professionals in the IT industry: An Empirical study. International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research. Vol.2 (6), Retrieved from www. indianresearchjournals.com

15. Rajesh, Saundarya & Ekambaram, Karthik. (2013). The Career Trajectories of Indian Women Professionals in the IT Industry: An Empirical Study. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research,*2(6),84-96.

16. Upadhya, Carol & Vasavi, A.R. (2008). In An Outpost of the Global Economy: Work and Workers in India's InformationTechnology Industry. Routledge, New Delhi.