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**Women and Workplace: Theoretical Perspectives
Addressing Harassment of Women**1. Professor 2. Research Scholar, Dept. Of Sociology, D.D.U. Gorakhpur
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Abstract: *Harassment is a prevalent problem of several workplaces in India, causing a serious impact on the mental health, self-esteem, progress and productivity of working women. Although sexual harassment is the most discussed and observed form, but other form of harassment that is verbal, physical and mental also have deep impact on the lives of women. The incidents of harassment were avoided earlier, but now, due to increased awareness among working women, it has been highlighted. Being a form of discrimination, it is contrary to the idea of equality between men and women, though it is a defined offence, still, there is a strong need to study the appropriate theoretical frameworks to know the causes and underlying notions for the existence of this problem. It cannot be studied from the perspective of only one theory or approach; it requires model resulting from the combination of different theories and approaches. The present paper will try to look into different theoretical perspectives for better understanding.*

Key words: Workplace, Theoretical, Perspectives, Harassment, Mental Health, Self -esteem

Introduction- Women are the most important pillars of any society or nation, their central role in society has ensured the stability, progress and long-term development of nations. Recently, the IMF stated that, 'women do much more unpaid work than men'. According to the Gender Gap Report 2024, 'India has closed 64.1% of overall gender gap in 2024. India's economic parity has been going upwards from last four editions, but it would need further improvement to bridge gender gap in terms of estimated earned income, senior and management role, labour workforce participation rate and professional and technical workers'. Earlier, women were bound mainly to their homes doing all the hard work for their family. Only a few of them stepped out and started pursuing an actual career. But as we are moving forward on the path of development, opportunities for them are increasing in terms of education and employment. The increasing no. of females in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, is one such indicator. Now more women are stepping into economic arena and this change is very important from the point of view of their economic empowerment. Not only this, they are now taking up different tasks which were supposed to be performed by males or are male oriented in nature. There is more participation of females in entrepreneurship and in defence sector. Significant rise in number of working women both in public and private sector is visible now. But the challenges for them are still the same, there is continuous verbal, sexual, physical and mental harassment of women at their workplace. For a long time, such incidents were avoided, but due to increased awareness, it's been highlighted now. It is all about power, hierarchy and domination over women. The working environment is still not much easy to handle for majority of working females in India. They are more likely to become subject of discrimination and exploitation. The toxic workplace culture is affecting both the professional and personal lives. They are often denied promotions, leadership of projects and increment even after doing the same amount of work as their male counterparts. Sometimes women withdraw from their work and workplace, such hostility and continued sense of insecurity keeps them bound to their homes. But the main issue is why they have to face such discrimination again and again. The problem is not only with the exclusion of women, the problem is with the structure, the foundation which excludes them and it is mainly determined by the men. The paper will try to look into theoretical perspectives dealing with the possible explanations of such discrimination against women.



Literature review-‘Prohibition of discrimination, harassment including sexual harassment and abuse of authority’, this Secretary General’s Bulletin ST/SGB/2008/5 of UN WOMEN, defines discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority which helps to understand how these are correlated and its impact on the working population.

‘Handbook on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013, it was released by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India in 2015. It provides detailed information about various aspects of sexual harassment, its forms and legal provisions to address the issue. It also defines the various notions related to this and how India is managing to provide safe working environment for women, both in private and public sector.

‘Workplace Harassment among Employees: An Explorative Study’, conducted by Asha P Shetty, B V Nithya Shree. Out of the 210 participants, 63.3% experienced occasional harassment, less than 10% experienced mild harassment, severe harassment was about 0.5% and no harassment was reported by 28.1%. Due to fear of repercussions participants were afraid to reveal their experience of harassment.

‘Sexual Harassment of women: Climate, Culture and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering and Medicines’, a consensus study report of National Academics of Science Engineering Medicine of The National Academic Press (NAP) tries to explore, the impact of sexual harassment on women in the field of science, technology and medicine.

In their study titled, ‘Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions in Delhi NCR (India): Level of Awareness, Perception and Experience’ by Adetutu Deborah Aina and Pradeep Kulshrestha, they found about awareness regarding sexual harassment in educational institutions of Delhi NCR, level of awareness was less in private universities as compared to state universities. A survey by Satyaki Dasgupta and Annesha Mukherji finds that 57 of the 567 respondents were assaulted by faculty or staff members in their institutions, observed domination of men over women in power hierarchy.

Objectives-

- ✓ To study different theoretical perspectives.
- ✓ To study the explanations given by different theories regarding gender differences.
- ✓ To study the reasons behind discrimination against women through theories.

Methodology: This research is based on descriptive research design. This study is qualitative in nature and is based on secondary type of data. Information for the purpose of study has been collected through secondary sources such as research papers, articles related to the topic, books for some theoretical review, websites providing information regarding harassment, etc.,

Theoretical Perspectives- Harassment cannot be understood from the perspective of a single theory, it requires analysis of various theories because a single theory is not enough to present every related aspect, hence different angles and perspectives are required.

The theory of Patriarchy- in this theory, patriarchy is considered as a system where men hold power over women, it assumes that men are the assets and women are liability, or in other words men are superior than women. In other words, it is, a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. So, what we see in society as discrimination of women is a reflection of deep- rooted patriarchy. Many scholars believe it to be systematic and institutionalized, as men hold power in all important institutions of society.

The functionalist theory- suggests that gender inequalities exist as a way to create division of labor, or to create a social system in which one group of population is responsible for certain task and another group is responsible for other task. This view of gender inequality sees predefined gender roles as harmonious; women take care of home while men work outside to meet the needs of family, and in this way, gender also helps in maintaining the order and stability of society. This



view has been criticized for neglecting the suppression of women and also for portraying the gender roles as beneficial for the order of society, it didn't get down to deeper level in order to know the realities of women suffering from the problems they face while performing their gender roles, it also neglected the aspirations of women.

The Interactionist perspective- states that gender is something which is created and strengthened through daily social interactions and the use of symbols. The meanings to the symbols which we use for daily interactions are socially created, which means it is the society who assigns meaning to it and we interact according to the current meaning attached to the symbols. The masculine and feminine notions of society are actually performed by us, this means that gender is not something we actually are, it is something which we do or perform. The status of men and women depends on their performance of assigned gender roles.

The Feminist perspective- it focuses on analyzing gender inequality. It provides framework for understanding how women's situation in society and experiences in those situations are different from men. Mackinnon (1979) maintained that women's inferior position in workplace and society in general is not only the consequence, but also a cause of harassment. Feminist theories have the opinion that, harassment is the result of ideology of male dominance and superiority in society, not only this but harassment also serves to strengthen gender discrimination, which means that it nurtures the male ideology. Feminists rely on the integration of gender problems, dominance over females and patriarchy to explain the situation of women in society and their workplace. They feel that gender stratification is the result of men having greater privilege over women.

Sex role spillover theory- this theory is based on irrelevant gender-based role expectations. It is more like carryover of gender-based roles to work place. Women have always been defined around the traditional role they perform, that is, the gendered role they perform, so, when women take up jobs outside traditional areas in male dominated workplace, men tend to rely on these gender-based expectation while interacting with women, this makes women the target at their workplace because they are always evaluated on gender roles and not on the basis of their work role.

The socio-cultural theory- it examines the social and cultural aspects which result in harassment in society. It occurs due to prevalent inequality and sexism in society. Historically, women were mostly marginalized and assumed to be lesser as compared to men. Cultural and societal norms have socialized men for leadership role and dominance in society, whereas, women are socialized to be submissive and non-reactive. These characteristics are reflected in the whole society, leading to harassment. When we observe any society, it is evident that many norms, beliefs, practices etc., somehow produce different kind of challenges for women. Women's aspirations are not much prioritized.

The Organizational theory- it suggests power to be one of the main elements which defines harassment. This theory says that, harassment is the result of power relations and authority, which derive from hierarchy present in organizations. The structure and environment at workplace mostly encourage harassment on the basis of workplace norms, gender bias and power relations between men and women. Men are mostly at higher positions in organizations like in management and supervision roles, which provides them more authority over their subordinates, and mostly women are at these subordinate levels, this leads to discrimination and exploitation. This perspective asserts that organizational hierarchy provides power to certain individuals over the others that can lead to the exploitation of those who do not possess such power and influence. The influential ones always get what they want.

Conclusion- Interpretation of these theories reveals that men always have some dominance over women in the society, and workplaces being a part of society also becomes the place of



exploitation of women. Society has normalized saying that women are weaker than men that's why they face such discrimination. The subordinate position of women in society is one such reason. It is a multidimensional issue and explaining it with the help of only one approach is not enough. Harassment negatively affects the victims, influence their course of life, affects their job performance, aspirations and economic empowerment. It undermines the dignity and well-being of women. It costs mental health, progress and productivity of women, so this issue is needed to be taken care of. Although it is a defined offence but still there is strong need to study the appropriate theoretical frameworks to know the underlying notions of this problem. It is important to get into the history, thoughts, perception etc., which helps us to understand about the existence and occurrence of this problem. This phenomenon cannot be understood from the perspective of a single theory or approach, it requires elaborate models resulting from combination of different theories and approaches. With the help of different theories, we can get to know about several aspects related to it. To reduce the frequency of such incidences, it is always essential to understand the nature of the problem. We can say that, to truly understand harassment, we need to study every factor related to it.

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