

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON WOMEN EMPLOYEES: A STUDY ON BPO INDUSTRY IN DELHI (NCR)

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ABSTRACT

Indian business process outsourcing (BPO) within the global supply chains of business services delivery and an international division of service labour. It acknowledges the BPO market's essential dependence on demand from lead firms in the United States and United Kingdom. Drawing on a conceptual synthesis of the Global Commodity Chain, Global Value Chain and Global Production Network frameworks, the article examines the impact of 2008's financial crisis on employment, work organisation and the experience of work in Indian BPO. Employer/industry sources and employee interviews reveal reconfigured local labour market dynamics, tightened work discipline, an extensification of working time, work intensification and unprecedented growth in job insecurity.

KEYWORD: Globalization, Women Employees, BPO Industry, Delhi (NCR)

INTRODUCTION

The Indian women today have ventured beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother and have sought employment and career outside their homes, and are actively participating in the economic and social development of the nation (Liddle & Joshi, 1986). Economic, social and political development during the recent decades has resulted in improvement in the position of women, especially in the area of education and labour force participation. Generally, women's work profile in India was confined to certain traditional occupations such as nursing, teaching etc. However, women today crossing all barriers and prejudices are working in all sectors including the sectors traditionally reserved for men such as

defence, engineering and even in night shifts for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector. A BPO is the delegation of one or more information technology intensive business process to an external provider that in turn administers and manages the selected process. Globally, as different processes of a business started being outsourced, the term Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) has gathered popularity. At present India has emerged as the global back office and customer service centre. In spite of competition from other developing countries, India remains the prominent location for outsourced business activities. The growth of Information Communication and Technology (ICT)

sector worldwide and the availability of large number of English speaking and low cost labour have resulted in India emerging as one of the desired destinations of BPOs (Ramesh, 2004). India is providing all kinds of back office business solutions and customer assistance to Transnational Corporations and their clients in North America, Europe and elsewhere. Advances in ICT, principally in broad banding, have made global outsourcing of such services possible and profitable.

India has enormous opportunities emerging from globalization and consequent lowering of tariff barriers. Information Technology has given India formidable brand equity in the global markets. Indian BPO companies have a unique distinction of providing efficient business solutions with cost and quality as an advantage by using state of art technology. Through joint efforts of Government and the Industry, software development and IT enabled services have emerged as niche opportunities for India in the global context. The Government has been making continuous efforts to make India a front-runner in the age of Information revolution. India today has the advantages of skilled manpower base, active and healthy competition amongst states in attracting investment in infrastructure as well as framing IT applications in areas such as e-governance, e-learning, e-commerce, entrepreneurship, software exports growth and a large potential in the domestic market. Information Technology Act dealing with Cyber Security, Cyber Crime and other information security related legal aspects is in place. As a result of technological

convergence at the infrastructure, services and industry level; there has been a tremendous up-surge in new product / service industries.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Business Process Outsourcing is the branch of IT by which services are rendered to the companies' clients. These services can be customer care, handling IT operations, financial backend processes etc. In present context India's competence in IT has been widely recognized and appreciated in ITES sector majorly. In India, BPO industry has grown in the last decade. India enjoys being the favorite offshore destination because of people (manpower) and location. Over 2million students graduate every year in India who are computer literate and can speak English. They are willing to work at nearly 80% less salary than their western counterparts (Raman, Budhwar and Balasubramanian, 2007). BPOs have a formal and structured HRM system in place which performs many strategic functions to enhance involvement and commitment of employees (Raman et al, 2007). The extent to which an employee is involved in one's task will enhance the engagement level of employee with the organization. Evolution of the concept of employee engagement can be traced back to 1990s when Kahn (1990) explained its meaning as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". The concept of engagement may be defined by different organizations differently but the end result is same for all

and i.e. discretionary effort (Perrin, 2003). Devi (2009) opines that engagement is the degree to which an employee puts discretionary efforts into his or her work over and above required time, brainpower or energy. Apart from competitive remuneration, teamwork, healthy working conditions, peer relationship, skill development, advancement opportunities and learning opportunities are said to have an impeccable effect on the level of engagement. Saks (2006) conducted a study in order to test a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and organization engagements based on social exchange theory. He identified that engagement can be at two levels: job engagement and organization engagement and concluded that different factors act as their antecedents. Perceived organizational support predicts both; job characteristics act as antecedent to only job engagement and procedural justice predicts organization engagement. Job and organization engagement mediated the relationships between the antecedents and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to quit, and organizational citizenship behaviour. Pritchard (2008) opines that the concept of Employee Engagement can be fairly defined in terms of: Say (Measure of how employees are going to portray their own organization), Stay (measuring employees' loyalty towards their organization) and Strive (measures employees' readiness to do "over and above" their duties to attain organizational success). These three dimensions so mentioned are clearly relevant for the BPO workforce. May, Gilson and Harter (2004) opine that meaningful jobs, job-security and presence

of transformational leaders are significantly related to engagement. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) argue that job engagement is associated with a fair allocation of workload, autonomy to exercise choice and control, receiving recognition and rewards for efforts, a supportive work environment, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. IT managers largely depend on their subordinates for understanding the technical solutions to propose strategies for business. They need to play the role of a coach and communicator in order to have coordination (Kanooni, 2005). The support extended by the supervisor indeed enhances the engagement level of employees. Studies have revealed that engaged employees tend to be more productive, efficient and have more chances to stay with their organization. Employee engagement has a positive correlation with enhanced performance.

BPO IN INDIA

The growth of the BPO sector in India has its roots in the liberalization and the globalization policy of the government of India. Since the 1990s the process of globalization and liberalization has led to the rapid growth in India's economy. The Indian BPO industry is growing at more than 35 percent since 2005, with revenues of US\$ 88.1 billion in fiscal year 2011. The industry accounted for 34 per cent of the worldwide BPO market in 2010 and is the world's largest destination for BPO services delivery. It has emerged as the largest private sector employer in the country, generating employment to over 4.5 million people (direct and indirect), with 50 per cent of employees below 25

years (NASSCOM, 2011). BPOs are typically categorized into back office outsourcing or non-voice sector and front office outsourcing or voice based sector. The non-voice process includes data encoding, database development, market research, handling of credit billing problems, loan processing, account management etc. The voice sector is often interchangeably referred to as the 'Call Centre industry', 'contact centre industry' or 'customer service industry' because the service entails interactive communication with the client or customers (Tara and Ilavarasan, 2009). The Call Centres are an important part of the BPO and it Call Centres constitute for more than one-third of the total employment and revenues in the BPO segment. The Call Centre employees handle two types of calls-outbound and inbound calls. The inbound calls are originating from the company's client and customers, who in phone or email voice their queries, complaints or other related customer concerns. The outbound Call Centre on the other hand are those originating from the Call Centre, which has been contracted by the company to sell or promote certain products and services. There are also blended call handling, meaning taking inbound calls while also making outbound calls (Ofreneo, et. al., 2007). BPOs in India are both domestic and international but the prominence arises in transnational BPOs where the clients or the owners are from developed countries like USA and UK (Singh and Pandey, 2005). In the transnational BPOs due to the difference in time zones between India and the developed countries such as UK or USA, most work are performed during night 3

hours, especially for the Call Centres as they have to deal with the clients. As the Call Centers or the voice process has to make and receive call, it has to be done during the daytime of the client countries, which corresponds to the Indian nighttime. In contrast to the voice based services or the Call Centres the non-voice service workers, are able to do their work at daytime. Therefore, the study focuses on the women Call Centre employees of the transnational BPOs in India because they have a solely night shift based work. This paper examines the health, social and psychological problems of women employees the transnational Call Centres in India.

WOMEN AT BPOS

Women represent almost one-third part of the BPO sector and their contribution in this industry is major. Technology and certain regulatory changes have accentuated the demand of female employees in BPO sector. The Factories Act has been amended to allow women working in night shifts provided, all provisions in place to ensure their safety. Employers need to provide equal opportunities to women employees and must maintain their dignity at workplace. Major reasons behind joining this industry are easy entry and exit, fair remuneration, not much qualification required and lifestyle. Yet, they face serious issues like, night shifts, flexible working hours, transportation, socio-cultural factors and sexual harassment, which need to be addressed. Women working in night shifts suffer from certain behavioral and psychological syndromes like, irritability, alcohol use, anxiety and depression etc.. In

India, women are supposed to take care of their families as home maker which disturbs their worklife balance while working in this sector.

WORK ENVIRONMENT AND CHALLENGES

The high pay package of the transnational Call Centers also bring with it work pressure and stress. The work in Call Centre is highly pressurized, closely monitored and monotonously routinized. There are 'call quotas' for both inbound and outbound services, as much as 400 calls a night in some companies. On top of these, the Call Centre agents cannot disclose their true nationality and even their names; they use a pseudo name in accordance with the client country they are serving. This creates the problem of dual identity, by being westerners by evening and Indians by day. The burden of work along with dual identity creates severe personal dilemmas. There is a strict time and motion regime with limited time (2-3 minutes) for making and answering call of customers, limited breaks and no interaction with employees while at work. Apart from the call quotas, call interceptors are there to monitor the calls along with the close circuit cameras positioned everywhere (Ofreneo, et. al., 2007). The Call Centre work becomes specially challenging for women due to the dual burden of work and family. Working in the Call Centre changes the role of the women in a number of ways. It challenges and changes the position of the women by physically taking her away from home and family. They have little time to spend with family members even if they are physically present at home during daytime

(Patel, 2006). The married employees have to deal with the dual burden of work and home. The erratic hours of work leads to a high level of stress and health problems, particularly for women employees.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF CALL CENTRE EMPLOYMENT

The Call Centre employment help the women in learning new skills and they are shaping and remaking their work, lives and even territorizing public spaces (Kelkar et.al., 2002). The women Call Centre employees learn a number of new skills and some even become more assertive as persons. The acquired skills, ranging from soft-skills such as communication, listening and interpersonal skills to product knowledge and technical competency, have given women a sense of confidence in dealing with their customers and the society at large. While some women want to pursue a career in the Call Centre industry others take it as a short-term job (Ng and Mitter, 2005). The Call Centre employment help the women to earn an income that far exceeds what they could previously earn and this serves as a catalyst for empowering them (Patel, 2006). The wages that they earn enable them to experience a new found freedom and autonomy. The Call Centre industry, with relatively high wages and high-tech working environment, is heralded as a source of liberation for women (Pradhan, 2005). The middle class urban women working in Call Centre are a rich amalgamation of the East and the West and have catapulted to new heights through gaining knowledge and experience by working in Call Centre. These women are helping in changing the attitudes of

parents towards their daughters and effectively contributing to the family income. Most of the women consider the employment in the Call Centre as a stepping-stone towards their career and a few work for supporting their family and for financing their own future education (Clark and Sekher, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Employment in transnational Call Centres along with high salaries and attractive facilities that an ordinary graduate could never imagine in India also bring with it insecurities and vulnerabilities which are partially reflected in the high attrition rates. The women employees suffer from a number of health problems including psychological stress. Women adopt different ways and strategies to cope up with the high level of stress that they face, with certain degree of success. The odd working hours and the highly pressurized work environment along with the burden of western accent, changed lifestyles and the dual identities aggravates the physical and psychological health problems of the women employees.

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