

Plight of Contractual Employees: A Study on Adverse Behaviours Encountered by the Contractual Employees in Delhi's Govt. and Autonomous Bodies at their Workplace and Society

^[1] Varun Nautiyal, ^[2] Dr. Nandni Goutam

^[1] PhD Research Scholar, Department of Research, Sunrise University, Bagar Rajput, Rajasthan, India

^[2] Assistant Professor (Guide), Department of Research, Sunrise University, Bagar Rajput, Rajasthan, India

* Corresponding Author's Email: ^[1] sovarnautiyal@gmail.com, ^[2] nandniravi86@gmail.com

Abstract— As per the Annual Survey of Industries (2019-2020) statistics on Employment and Labour Cost by Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, the no. of contract workers employed in Delhi Industries (factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948) during the Year 2019-20 was reported to be 10594 which speaks volume about dependency of the organizations on contract labour to run various services. Be it financial equality or, social security or, respect as an individual, contractual employees have to face disparities in their day to day lives as compared to those who are permanent employees.

This present article elicits the findings of the study conducted in 18 government departments, ministries and other autonomous bodies in Delhi with a sample of 384 contractual and regular employees through structured questionnaire method. The aim was to evaluate the disparities faced by the contractual employees while working in their respective organizations basis their day to day inter-personal interactions and behaviours encountered at workplace and subsequently, highlight the areas of intervention to be made by concerned departments / government for creating a conducive work environment for all its employees.

Keywords: Contractual, Government, Disparities, Behaviors.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Quarterly Report on Employment Scenario (As on 1st January, 2022) by Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India defines regular and contractual workers (Pg. 38) as follows:

- **Regular Worker** - The person who has worked in non-farm enterprises and, in return, received salary or wages on a regular basis (i.e., not on the basis of daily or periodic renewal of work contract) is a regular worker. This category includes not only persons getting time wage but also persons receiving piece wage or salary and also paid apprentices, both full time and part-time. Regular Workers are employees appointed on an open-ended contract with no stipulated termination date, and who are entitled to benefits such as paid leave and medical aid contributions paid by employers. This excludes self-employed workers.
- **Contract Worker** - As per the definition of contract worker, a worker is deemed to be employed as contract worker when he/she is hired in connection with the work of an establishment by or through a contractor. Contract workforce are indirect employees; i.e., persons who are hired, supervised and remunerated by a contractor who, in turn is compensated by the establishment.

While the permanent employees are safeguarded by various labour laws and policies meant to lend them a secure

social and economic life in present and future, no significant directives/guidelines/policies are available regulating contractual appointments and adherence to labour laws, otherwise applicable to a regular employee in Delhi. With families of appx. 3 lakh employees depending on the earnings and continuity of their respective contracts, it becomes imperative to understand and underline the existing work culture and socio-economic disparities with respect to contractual employees in Delhi government bodies.

As per one of the articles published in 'The Economic Times' (online platform) in August, 2014, as much as 12.3 million people working in the government sector — or 43% of total government workforce were engaged in temporary jobs, according to a study by the Indian Staffing Federation (ISF), an apex body of staffing companies in the country. An estimated 49.7 million people worked in the formal sector in India, of which 28.8 million were temporary workers, ISF said. The report said India is ranked among the top five in terms of absolute size of the flexi staffing industry, but has only 0.43% penetration of labour force. Of the 397.4 million Indian workforces, 347.7 million were in the informal sector, it said.

Another statistics published by the Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) in the online platform of 'The Economic Times', 2023 states that India has registered a 14% jump in the 2022-23 with addition of 0.17 million flexi workers, taking the total workforce to 1.44 million compared to 1.26

million flexi workforce in the preceding year.

The article published by Aashay Jain on the e-journal- 'Legal Service India', 2023, on the topic "The Debate over Contract Labour in India: Pros and Cons" concludes that there are both advantages and disadvantages of contract labour in India. However, despite of its benefits like affordability, adaptability etc., it also leaves scope of exploitation and job insecurity and hence, an appropriate legislation is required to safeguard the rights of contract workers and to make sure that they receive just compensation, benefits, and working conditions. Accountability on the part of employers for the fair and respectable treatment of their contract workers is also the

need of the hour.

According to Labour and Employment statistics, 2022 released by Ministry of Labour and Employment, Directorate General of Employment, Govt. of India, the percentage distribution of workers by status in employment for the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 indicates a higher percentage of casual labour engaged in employment as compared to regular wage/salaried employees. Moreover, the percentage of casual labour has also remained almost constant over these years which mean that the contribution being made by the contractual labour is as significant as that by regular employees and that the organizations are really dependent for their smooth operations over them.

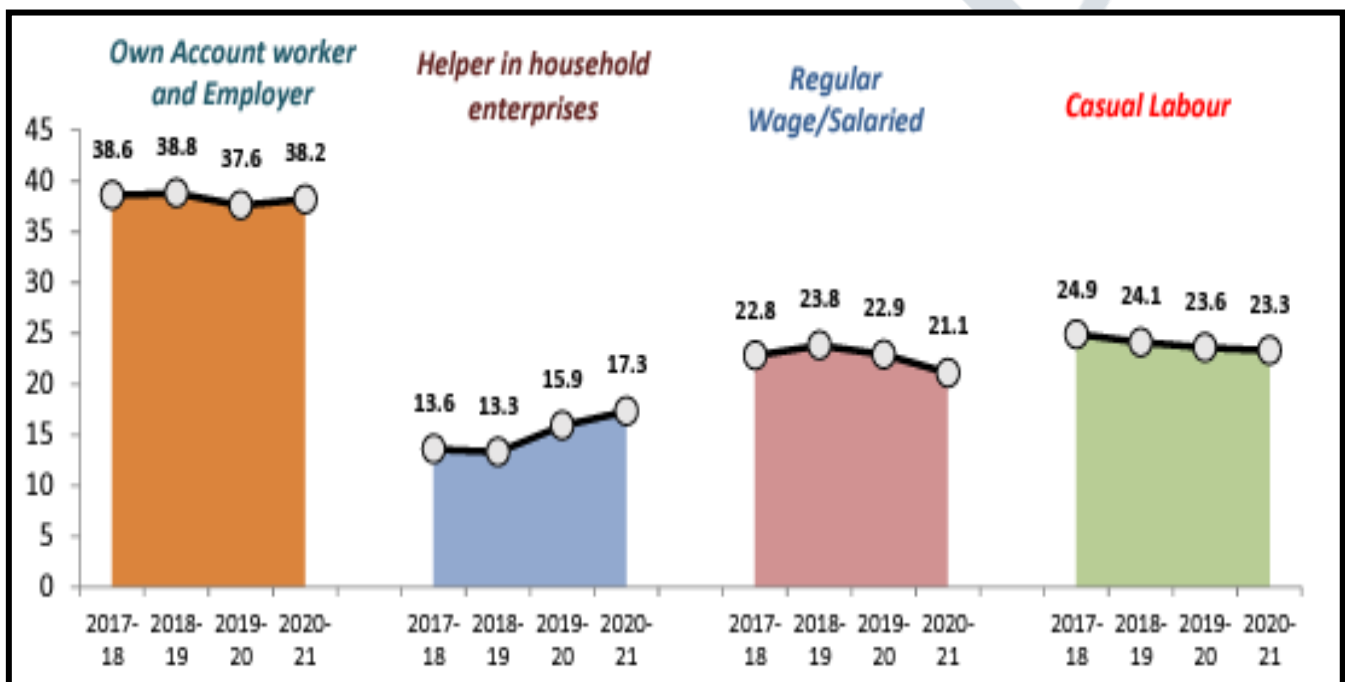


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of Workers by Status in Employment

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey Reports, MoSPI

Therefore, the study tries to analyse these gaps in detail with an objective to highlight the often unnoticed yet significant negative/harsh behaviours encountered by the contractual employees at their workplace and society along with other monetary and social provisions from which they are excluded as compared to their regular counterparts. This paper brings forward various unsaid employment disparities, in-humane treatment and other associated risks and challenges of working under contractual employment.

II. METHOD AND DATA

The data for this paper has been collected from various contractual employees in groups 'B', 'C' & 'D' working in the 18 government departments, central ministries and other autonomous bodies in Delhi, India. This research is a part of a doctoral thesis under the department of research in Sunrise University, Rajasthan, India. The main objective of the

research is to analyze socio-economical vulnerability of contractual employees in government employment in present scenario.

This paper focuses on the qualitative data as collected from 384 employees and 18 government departments, ministries and other autonomous bodies through 'Structured Questionnaires' method.

III. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of the study demonstrates that most of the contractual employees have to face extreme challenges in surviving their work environment and are often subjected to mistreatment and disrespect at workplace / office and even in their social circle. Further, it reveals that the risks and threats available to these contractual employees are mostly common irrespective of their position in the organization, type of organization they are working in or, number of years they

have contributed in their respective organizations.

The study shows that factors like, gender, socio-economic background, kind of social networks, category of employment etc. too does not have any significant relevance / impact on the treatment contractual employees are subjected to.

The analysis of data for proper understanding of the emerging facts has been done using word tools, excel and graphs and have been coded properly with words and sentences relevant to the major research questions of the study.

For this paper, the following two major questions have been addressed:

- a. What kind of behaviors are encountered by contractual employees at their workplace and in their social circle?**
- b. How much pride employees take in their engagement with their respective organizations as ‘contractual staff’?**

Key Areas for Discussion in the paper	
Key Questions	Key Highlights of the facts elicited as per study
1. What kind of behaviors are encountered by contractual employees at their workplace and in their social circle?	1.1 Frequent Impolite, disgraceful and biased behavior of seniors & colleagues 1.2 Work monitored more, less / no recognition given
2. How much pride employees take in their engagement with their respective organizations as ‘contractual staff’?	2.1 Employees feel requirement of hiding contractual identity while dealing with outside office matters 2.2 Employees advice against getting into contractual jobs

3.1. What kind of behaviors are encountered by contractual employees at their workplace and in their social circle?

In this section, the paper discusses the first thematic question. This question is seen through some relevant problems and factors that are shared by the respondents during the data collection.

3.1.1. Frequent Impolite, disgraceful and biased behavior of seniors & colleagues

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s politeness theory—based on the work of American sociologist Erving Goffman—explains the human strategy behind politeness. Each person has two faces: one positive and one negative. Positive face reflects an individual’s self-esteem and

self-image. It’s about the need to seek approval from others. Negative face reflects the need for personal freedom of choice on every level—it’s the right to make one’s own decisions. Brown and Levinson conclude that every human interaction contains potential threats to these two faces that the rules of politeness attempt to counterbalance. Accordingly, politeness is a balancing act between the desires to uphold our own faces without attacking the faces of others.

One of the most important findings of the study has been the feedback of the contractual employees with respect to the negative behaviors they encounter at the workplace of their seniors and colleagues. The findings re-enforces the revelation of a study done by Harvard Business Review, according to which good manners really are on the decline in the workplace: 98% of employees have been on the receiving end of disrespect, with half of them saying it happens at least once a week.

More than 60% of the contractual employees have reported that their seniors never or, only sometimes use polite/professional language while communicating/assigning any official work with them. Most of the times, they are dealt unprofessionally with very often use of derogatory and demeaning languages/slans in Hindi like, ‘oye’, ‘tu/tujhe’, ‘chup be’ and use/reference of abusive words like, ‘saale’, ‘bexxxxxx’ etc.. The employees also narrated that their superiors very often make usage of harsh and authoritative language like, "Do whatever is instructed" which in a way reflects the expectations of seniors from their juniors employed on contractual basis to blindly follow the instructions and implement the directions without suggestions / inputs of their own. Understandably sometimes, basis the urgency / confidentiality of tasks, the same maybe justified but, if such behaviors are regular and without any concrete reason, than there is something to be worried about.

A workplace is more than just a collection of individuals; it is a cohesive team working towards common goals. A sense of unity and mutual respect flourishes when each team member embraces and follows etiquette guidelines. Colleagues become collaborators, contributing to a positive and supportive atmosphere. The synergy generated by a team adhering to shared etiquette principles translates into increased collaboration, ultimately boosting overall productivity. 89% contractual employees shared that their seniors never or, sometimes only in emergency, assign confidential and important tasks to them as they mostly prefer giving such tasks to regular employees. On the contrary, most of the contractual employees told that it is very common for them to get warnings of transfers, termination, punishments etc. in case of any delayed or, non-completion of any task, for which their regular colleagues would not even be bothered in normal circumstances. Further, it was also felt by more than half of the contractual employees that no matter whose responsibility or, fault is, for any work failure, they being contractual employees are made scapegoat, just being a part of that particular task/team.

When asked, if in case of any urgency or, personal work, are they given relaxation to attend office late or leave early, majority of the employees responded negatively. Most of the times, it was reported that they have to literally plead for or, give documents/evidence in support of their request to leave early or, arrive late whereas, no such boundations were seen for those employees who were engaged on regular basis.

Another very interesting fact which was highlighted during the data collection process was that most of these employees feel that people/staff in their office deliberately highlight their 'contractual' identity while conversing with an outsider; clearly indicating their intentions to demean the identity of the contractual employees in front of others. Also, it indicated that there exists a large disparity in the mindset of the regular employees towards their colleagues engaged on contractual basis.

3.1.2. Work monitored more, less recognition given

Organizations create a culture of authenticity when they foster an inclusive environment that celebrates diverse identities and perspectives. Employees who feel comfortable being themselves are more likely to contribute innovative ideas, collaborate effectively and build strong relationships with colleagues. Further, encouraging open communication allows employees to express their ideas and concerns freely, requiring leadership to listen actively and promote transparency. In the case of contractual employees, the case is completely different wherein, their work is monitored more than what is normally required and they hardly get any recognition by their organization, in case of any achievement/accomplishment. Further, more than 70% of the contractual employees felt that their grievances and complaints are never heard seriously by reporting authorities. They are either given false assurance to help them with their complaints or, are simply turned away suggesting to look for settlement amongst themselves.

Freedom in the workplace is essential to cultivate an engaged and energized workforce. But freedom doesn't mean a lack of structure or accountability. Today's employees value flexibility and autonomy and seek environments where they can thrive both professionally and personally. Granting freedom in the workplace accelerates the productivity of an organization and build a relationship of trust and mutual understanding among employees and management. In the case of present study, almost 90% of the employees interviewed reported that they do not get any leverage of flexibility and choice in selecting work as per their interest or, experience. It is more or less, a one way top to bottom approach wherein, they get to work on specific seats/tasks as per the directions/requirement of the management without acknowledging the individual interest area, strengths and weaknesses.

3.2. How much pride contractual employees take in their engagement as a contractual staff

3.2.1. Employees feel requirement of hiding contractual identity

Employees, in general, would like to take pride in whatever they do, if there is wholehearted cooperation and support from the top. It is up to the management to ensure that the creed of excellence is nurtured in the organization not by mere words, but by the way of supporting them with timely appreciation and recognition. When employees take pride in their roles, it significantly impacts their identity, leading to increased job satisfaction, higher productivity, improved morale, stronger loyalty to the company, and a more positive overall work culture, essentially contributing to a more engaged and productive workforce; making their role a source of personal fulfillment and self-worth.

The case here differs, as appx. 76% employees said that while dealing with an outside office matter, they find it important to hide their 'contractual' identity. They do not feel proud to be called as 'Contractual Employees' and feel very essential to be not tagged as 'contractual' while meeting or, interacting with outside world, organizations and employees. Further, they also felt that the outlook of regular employees towards them is generally in an inferior way wherein, they are seen in a lesser meaningful and reliable way.

It was stated by one the respondents who have been in his organization from more than 10 years that "It's highly disappointing for them not be acclaimed for their education, experience and contribution of over a decade but, being treated and judged by most in terms of their employment contract; which demotivates them and other young people getting into contractual employment for various reasons".

More than half of the employees also felt that their 'contractual employment' status affect their marriage prospect and social reputation. They often get judged by their own relatives and friends and keep on getting regular advice from their relatives/family to try for regular job rather than sticking on contractual.

3.2.2. Employees advice youth against getting into contractual jobs

Individuals often rely on the advice of more experienced peers to minimize uncertainty and increase success likelihood. Further, recent researches have shown that individuals will often preferentially follow advice rather than imitating observed behavior and will often rely more on advice than even their own experiential information. Interestingly, when asked about what advice they would give to the young professional while / before getting into jobs of contractual nature or, in another words would they give advice to young people to get into contractual jobs, almost 100% of the contractual employees advised youth against getting into contractual jobs.

One of the respondents quoted that *“it’s better for a youngster to get into private jobs or, prepare for regular jobs through competitive exams rather than getting into jobs in government sector on contractual basis where, there is benighted work culture and a bleak future. There is a possibility one can be acknowledged for his contribution in a private company but, there is no chance of any recognition or, preferential treatment in a government sector, if you are engaged on contractual basis.”*

IV. DISCUSSION

The study raises a very important question to all the stakeholders and decision makers in government and that is *“is our youth professionally and emotionally safe working on contractual arrangements without any clear policy for their growth and stability and without any support from those working around them?”* The study also asks question from the youth working in government on contractual employment basis; *“have they chosen the contractual employment as career option out of choice (with informed decision based on self-research) or, compulsion (because of not getting any other relevant opportunity), if the answer is former i.e., ‘choice’ than unfortunately, they aren’t entitled to complaints or, raising concerns in future or, for say any claim for regularization or equal treatment to their regular counterparts.”*

While it is evident (as per the findings of the study) that there are problems in the work culture where there are contractual employees, the underlined fact is that until or unless solutions are provided to these problems nothing is going to be changed, in fact the agony will keep on increasing. And the first and foremost step towards solution is that the concerned government / departments/team leaders shall acknowledge that the problem exists and that it severely affects the employees and their productivity.

An article published at 'Tax Guru', 2023 by Aashay Jain, terms ‘contractual employment’ as one of the most severe forms of unorganized labour with lot of disadvantages as given below:

- **Lack of job security:** Contract workers have no guarantees regarding their employment and frequently have no idea what their future career prospects will be, which can cause stress and worry.
- **Exploitation:** Contract workers are frequently taken advantage of by companies that provide them cheap pay, few or no benefits, no job security, and unsafe working conditions.
- Lower job satisfaction and motivation may result from contract workers not receiving the same opportunities and perks as permanent employees.
- **Lack of legal protection:** Because contract workers are not covered by labor laws and regulations, they are at risk of being taken advantage of and mistreated.

- **Limited career advancement:** Because contract workers are frequently recruited for specific tasks or projects, they may not have the same prospects for career advancement as regular employees.

In general, contract labor can result in exploitation, a lack of benefits and job security, as well as a reduction in productivity and career advancement. Employers must make sure that contract workers receive equitable treatment, proper benefits, and development opportunities.

Swadesh Dev Roye, National Secretary, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), had told "NewsClick" dated 19 August, 2021 that the problem of contractualisation of work is a "cancerous one." He added that one must not just focus on increasing non-permanent jobs in the public sector enterprises because there are different, "much serious" related aspects.

The concluded study reflects a very sad picture of the existing work culture in Indian government set-up wherein, on the basis of contract / terms of engagement/employment some people are over privileged and some are significantly less privileged. Moreover, there exists no mechanism to review or monitor the work environment to ensure that staff on contractual employment are dealt sensitively and at par to their counter parts engaged on regular basis.

Appx. 54% of the contractual employees in the study conducted fall in the age group of 18-45 years which is considered to the youth category. Youth of a country can make or, break its economy and culture and hence, it becomes utmost important that our youth are highly taken care of. They should be respected for what they are and be cared for their education, experience and skills and be nurtured so as to make them contribute towards the benefit of the organization and society as a whole. The office/work environment should be made conducive for promoting retention of talented youth and support in savings for the future.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an era, where we talk about human rights including right to live with dignity, there are these contractual employees who merely on the basis of their employment terms and dire financial needs are made scapegoats and often subjected to harsh and inhumane treatment by their colleagues, senior management and society. While, most of us are aware of this, but very few highlight it at the right forums and this grim situation remains the same. To add upon this, there lay financial differences wherein, these employees struggle to get paid equally for the work they are doing similar to their regular counter-parts with even less social security provisions.

Despite the poor work environment, inadequate socio-economic provisions, lack of support and acknowledgement from regular employees/management, as recorded in several studies (including the present study) on

contractual employment, people tend to see a lot of possibilities and positives in the contractual employment set-up, especially for those who dream to serve the government but, are not able to get into regular employment clearing the recruitment procedures. Hence, while it is important to have such mode of engagements continued, there strongly requires policies and guidelines in place to support inclusive growth and stability of contractual employees in government set-up and to avoid any kind of social, emotional or, financial exploitation.

The study suggests a strong need of sensitization programmes, training and orientation sessions in the government sector for both contractual and regular employees so that employees can gel with each other and are more sensitive towards needs of one another and work in teams. Regular employees' annual appraisals should be 360° based wherein, adequate feedback from their subordinates or, colleagues (including contractual staff) is taken to assess their performance and conduct in the work place in the concerned year. This would not only give correct feedback about a particular individual's conduct but, also re-assure the contractual employees about their importance in the system, being colleagues, juniors or seniors, whatever the case is.

This paper has also explored what emotions are of the contractual employees trying to survive in a system where the regular employees have more say, more recognition and more reputation which was expressed in terms of the feedback and response to the questions asked. This signifies that there is a vulnerability which generally cannot be understood by an outsider but, which exists deeply and is potentially dangerous for the overall well-being of the society.

The findings of the study indicates towards requirement of an immediate and collective intervention by government, policy makers and social work practitioners across the globe to evaluate the existing work culture. There is a strong requirement of also ensuring the equitable work distribution and treatment on humanitarian ground of labour force employed. The employment systems and work environment should be more labor focused and focused towards productivity rather than bending towards a particular segment of employees based on their employment terms and conditions. Research works in the past too had elicited this need.

The paper concludes with recommendations of bringing in policy level changes in the hiring/recruitment process with more transparency, humanitarian touch and well-built orientation programme for both regular and contractual employees at the entry level itself. Apart from this, regular counseling and therapy sessions should be arranged for the employees to facilitate the process of catharsis and subsequent, grievance handling. Clear-cut indicators to ascertain healthy work environment should be put in place for the leadership to review and assess timely. Employment terms and conditions should be made more flexible to be

suitable to contractual employment for example, flexible working hours for women and sick, choice of work in a particular team which best suits a person's skills and his interest areas etc.

Last, but not the least parents, society and institutions should be educated and sensitized towards needs of people around them who are engaged on contractual employment to provide more comfort, acclaims and reputation for their value in the society, Indian economy, employment systems and overall contribution to the progress of the nation. After all, they are running, grinding and giving it all to sustain themselves and their families, and are far better than those who choose the other paths of staying unemployed, getting into wrong means of money earning and just sitting and criticizing systems.

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