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The Right to Sit: A Question of Workplace Dignity

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What may seem like a simple act of sitting has become a symbol of class division and silent control in many Indian workplaces. Denial of this basic comfort, particularly in retail and service sectors, raises deeper concerns over labor rights, dignity, and outdated hierarchical attitudes.

In modern India, thousands of workers, especially women employed in retail and service industries, spend long hours on their feet without access to basic seating. While this might appear trivial, the lack of a “right to sit” reflects broader issues of workplace dignity and socio-economic inequality. Despite legal progress over the decades, this fundamental right is still not guaranteed or enforced for many.

Historically, during colonial times, the act of sitting in front of British officials required a *Kursi Nashin* certificate, a document that symbolized obedience and one’s place in a hierarchy. That legacy of control through posture has quietly persisted. Today, retail employees are often forced to stand under the pretext of professionalism, customer attentiveness, or productivity. In reality, this often masks a lingering attitude that equates physical strain with diligence and comfort with laziness.

The denial of seating is not enshrined in any formal policy, but many employers discourage or outright prohibit sitting during work hours. This practice, though unwritten, subtly reinforces outdated ideas of superiority and control. It suggests that only those in power has earned the right to rest, while the worker must endure physical hardship in silence.

Internationally, the issue has gained legal ground. In Israel, courts have ruled in favor of employees in high-profile cases such as *Elad Daniel v. Fox Group*, where poor seating conditions resulted in substantial compensation. The judgment emphasized that the right to sit depends on the nature of the job and the necessity for standing. Globally, standards set by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), particularly Article 23, affirm the right to just and favorable conditions of work, which include dignity and respect.

In India, labor law has evolved from being a colonial tool to suppress local industries to serving as a framework for worker protection. The *Industrial Disputes Act* of 1947 marked a significant shift toward fairer conditions, including reasonable hours, humane treatment, and mechanisms for resolving conflicts. However, issues like the right to sit remain unaddressed in practice, highlighting the need for updated standards that reflect both economic growth and human decency.

A chair may be a simple object, but in many workplaces, it has come to represent much more than a test of how far we’ve come in respecting those who work hardest to keep society running.