WOMEN IN INDIAN IT SECTOR: GENDER INEQUALITY

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Abstract

The study attempts to examine the gender gap prevalent in the IT sector with special reference to the post-liberalized era. Nowadays women in almost all the fields right from politics to defence which was considered a male-oriented sector although after the implementation of policies, witness that there are no sectors where women are not of. However, even after so many laws passed favouring women, their share is still less. Though over the years the share of women employees have increased, they still are behind the concept of equality. Thus, the study focused on the women IT employees working in six different cities of India.

Keywords: Gender Bias, Gender Discrimination, Gender Gap, Gender Inequality, IT Sector, Trade Liberalization, Women.

Introduction

Gender inequality is a situation where there is unequal treatment of men and women based on their gender. Sen (2001) defined gender inequality as "not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems." According to him, these could be mortality inequality; nasality inequality; basic facility inequality for instance, unequal access to schooling to girls; special opportunity inequality such as, unequal access to higher education, professional trainings etc.; professional inequality in certain occupations; inequality in ownership of assets; and inequality within household in the division of labour.

Gender equality plays a vital role in the economic development of a country. From time immemorial women are subjected to stay within four walls of the house. Even if women plan on moving forward in terms of going for higher studies or working after marriage, only a few cross that boundary set by the society, rest are prone to the social stigma. As it is mentioned in the World Bank Development Report (2012), the empowerment of women and the participation in the economic affairs, such as labor market and access to property, have a relevant impact in the economic and social development of the countries. It transcends to the economic area because the mainstreaming of gender equality creates smart economies, which are characterized by efficiency improvements, higher productivity and development outcomes, and more representative institutions for future generations. This is the reason why reducing gender differences become an important issue.

Many studies have shown that in most parts of South Asia the mobility of women is limited and that young girls and women are often expected to take the responsibility of the house and men are supposed to be the bread-winners of the family.

The effect of trade liberalization is different for different sections of the society like it might be different for rich, poor, women, persons with a disability etc. Increased trade liberalizations increase trade opportunities and increased output may lead to greater participation of women in the paid workforce. The increased trade opportunities are expected to benefit both men and women in terms of increased employment and increased output.

Ederington et al. (2010) find similar results for Colombia. Aguayo et al. (2013) find that the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) increased demand for female labour both within and between industries in Mexico.

Women in India have come a long way after independence. Many legislative measures were taken for the upliftment of women but only few are aware of such rights. However, after the new economic policies of the 1990's which were due to the balance of payment crisis and the help that was rendered to India came with certain conditions which led to a change in the economic policies of the country. These policies did bring about a drastic change and saw women being employed more but still their share in the workforce as well all other key sectors was minimal.

It was through the trade policies of 1990$_S$ that paved the way for growth of IT as one of the fastest and most attractive sectors of the economy. Development of the IT sector along with improved communicative networks bridging the spatial boundaries increased the scope of people seeking a paid job. India provides the IT companies access to a large cross-section of educated English-speaking and cheap labour force and the Indian Government's initiative to boost the sector through Technology parks adds to the fact that it provides employment opportunities to the educated unemployed including women. The NASSCOM report (2009) revealed that the proportion of women workforce in the sector at the entry as well as the middle level management has increased considerably nevertheless there is adequate representation of women at the senior management.

Many measures were taken to assess the inequality like Gender Empowerment Index which is part of Human Development Index by UNDP. Likewise the Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum One such measure is the Gender Inequality Index (GII) of UNDP. According to the UNDP, this index is a composite measure to quantify the loss of achievement within a country due to gender inequality. It uses three dimensions to measure opportunity cost: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. In India, we see such ranking indexes along with the census report, giving the level of inequality prevalent in the country.

Witness that the literacy rate has increased from 52.21 percent in 1991 to 74.04 percent in 2011, i.e. the female share increased from 39.29 percent to 65.46 percent, one of the main reasons is trade openness which in turn has brought about a change in the mindset among people. Similarly, when notice the sex ratio of 1991 it was 927 per 1000 males and has increased to 943 in 2011. Now, India ranks 122 out of 191 countries in the gender inequality index according to the UNDP Human Development Report and expects that it is bound to increase in future years.

Paramasivan, C (2013) Empowerment of women in the third world countries is important because the benefits will be felt not only by the women themselves, but by their households as well. It may take a more enlightened approach to ensure the empowerment of women in developing countries, but the returns to their families and even the societies as a whole will be worth it.

A study conducted by National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), i.e. a survey of 55 firms revealed that India's IT-BPM industry at present employs nearly 3.9 million people, among that around 34 percent are women which is far less than India's total workforce, an analysis indicates that over 51 percent of entry level are women, over 25 percent of women are in managerial positions but less than 1 percent in the C-Suite. Though over the years the share of women employees have increased, they still are behind the concept of equality. The GSM-IT survey (2017) reveals that women constitute only 30 percent (approx) in the sector. Keeping in view the above problems, following are the objectives of the study: (i) to examine the reasons for gender inequality in the IT sector, (ii) to evaluate the recommendations of companies act 2013 with respect to appointment of women as Board of Directors, and (iii) to

analyse the extent of access to technology that women hold.

Methodology

The study focused on the women IT employees working in six different cities viz. Chennai, Ahmadabad, Noida, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune. The information was collected through both primary and secondary methods. The primary data was collected through Google forms and the secondary data was collected through NASSCOM website, newspaper etc. The sampling technique used here is stratified sampling. The sample size is 159 where 32 responses have been collected from Noida, 38 from Bengaluru, 25 each from Pune and Hyderabad, 26 from Ahmedabad and 13 from Chennai focusing on women IT employees. To analyze the categorical variables in the study, descriptive statistics-cross tabulation and Chi-square test was done using SPSS Software.

Concepts

*Glass ceiling***:** Glass ceiling refers to the fact that a qualified person wishing to advance within the hierarchy of his/her organization is stopped at a lower level due to discrimination most often based on sexism or racism.

Pipeline: The pipeline theory suggests that increasing the number of women in male-dominated fields should lead to more equality in the labour market.

C-Suite: It's a name from the titles of top senior executives which tend to start with the letter 'C', for Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, etc., also known as "C-level executives". The report titled 'Women in Business 2023 - The push for parity', noted that 32 percent of senior management positions are now held by women globally, in mid-market businesses, and the same stands at 36 percent in India.

Findings and Suggestions

About 80.5 percent of the respondents feel that 'work-from-home' is a boon but only 34 percent of the respondents have that facility. Thus, leading to work-life imbalance and hence less participation of women in the sector. About 48.4 percent that women are given lesser monetary benefits when they return from maternity leave whereas 39.5 percent feel it's in the form of promotional options, they are restricted to grow further in their careers leading to class ceiling. About 73 percent of the respondents felt women are underrepresented in the IT sector. About 62.9

percent respondents were married and among them 72 percent felt there is under representation of women. It can be said that women felt the extent of gender inequality after their marriage. It was found through Chi-square test women were given normal work timings i.e. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. About 34.6 percent worked during swing hours and only 3.8 percent during graveyard hours. The data from NASSCOM revealed that even after the enactment of the Companies Act 2013 regarding the woman being in the Board of Directors, only few make it to the top level/ C-suite. Among the respondents, only 62.9 percent are aware that women are to be made part of the Board of Directors. Among the 159 responses, 69.8 percent felt the difficulty in accessing the technology in their workplace/ while doing their educational course. The accessibility of technology is also one of the reasons for lesser women participation in the IT sector.

The gender disparity starts right from the time of birth; hence people should be made aware of this as well as the various schemes initiated by the Government's and the NGO's. Mere advertising of these schemes is not enough; people must be educated on this. Though the educational system in India has increased, it is comparatively very less compared to other developing countries. Thus, that is an area to be focused again. The curriculum should include gender neutral concepts and should stress on gender sensitizing. The access to technology to women in general both at educational and at the work level is still difficult. Only when they have increased access to technology will they be able to study and work without any difficulty and thereby reducing the gender gap in the sector. The Indian Government should set up a Glass ceiling committee just like the USA to check on the artificial barriers in the sector which has led to gender inequality.

Though nowadays companies have come up with more work friendly norms but still lacks in the area of helping their employees in work-life balance. Women going on maternity leave should not be seen in a skeptical way; rather they must be encouraged in all ways possible so that the employees don't think of resigning the job. Support career paths in and through middle management by way of programs, policies and training. Create part-time leadership training for employees

who want to grow further in their career. The companies and Government through joint initiative can collectively offer mentoring and networking support. Reward managers for good mentoring and thereby including it in the promotion criteria. Career development paths can be made more transparent. The gap can be addressed through assisting new hires to develop support networks within the company.

Conclusion

Women still continue to carry the burden of negotiating various roles assigned to them either socially, or by nature i.e. their family and professional life. Only very few strive to balance both and giving up the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder is still in practice. The patriarchal ideas not only restrict women moving upward in their career but also limit men who would want to spend time with family. Gender imbalances continue to rock every sphere of society. Gender as well as socio-economic, race and caste should not be a parameter to include and exclude people for work in a democratic and secular country like India. Similarly, technology shouldn't be something for gender segregation.

The question addressed in the study is about the prevalence of gender inequality in the IT sector with the concept of 'Glass Ceiling' while this is a larger issue at hand; the study tries to get a general perspective of employees working in the IT sector. The study is confined to the opinions of the women employees. The study revealed that there is still a gender gap in spite of companies and Government taking a lot of measures, though the extent of the barriers for women to grow has reduced and the extent of women in the top management has comparatively increased over the years, particularly after the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013. Access to technology is limited to only a small group of employees as is the case during the course of education. The issue must be dealt with strategically and thereby help tapping the pool of existing and prospective employees. Even though the picture of gender inequality has turned from opaque to translucent, there are still miles to go.

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