Social Exclusion of Women in India: A Corporate Sector Perspective

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Abstract: The Indian law requires the corporate to disclose its financial position by publishing the balance sheet and to motivate the shareholders but there is no rule which demands the disclosure of the imbalance in the balance sheet of human resources of the organization. This imbalance is caused due to differences in gender, caste or age of the employees. India ranked 101st position in progress towards bridging the gender gap among the 136 nations surveyed in 2013. A report by National Sample Survey reveals that the female LPFR (Labour Force Participation Rate) has declined by 10% in the last 5 years. For decades it has been seen that presence of women in senior management positions is very low in spite of the skills and knowledge they possess. Out of the total workforce of the formal sector, only 14-15% are women. When it comes to holding senior positions, only 4% of the directors of publicly listed Indian companies are women. This paper aims to discuss the factors leading to such exclusion of women in the corporate sector and the measures organizations should take to include and promote women in higher managerial positions.

Keywords: Exclusion, Gender Gap, Senior Positions.

I. INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have seen remarkable progress in the status of women. They have become more independent. They are working on jobs which were earlier restricted only to men. They are earning high salaries and secure higher positions in the institutions. Yet the cultural roots of gender inequality are still strong in India. Even after more than 60 years after the idea of equality translated into India's constitution, social exclusion remains a central concern for the nation. The constitution mandates policy makers to address common drivers of social exclusion by declaring: "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds (...) of religion, race, caste, sex (and) place of birth", the Directive Principles of State Policy further call on the State to "minimize the inequalities in income (...) status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people.

Despite such acts and directions, the Indian society has always maintained a tradition: "a woman's place is at home". (Jacob, 1999; Moore, 1995) Most of the women still believe that their duties are restricted only to the household chores. Even then, the power to take decisions of the house is vested with the men. Indian women lack the courage to stand in the society and she is always looking for a support. But now with the introduction and advancement of education and changing mindset of younger generation, have compelled the society to change and think differently. Now women are trying to participate at outside levels and they are progressing towards managerial ranks. But the society does not welcome women with red carpet and she has to break many barriers to climb up the career path.

II. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Exclusion is the denial of control over natural resources; the denial of opportunities for health care, education, housing; the denial of the right to participation in social, economic, political and cultural life; the denial of human rights and dignity. The concept of social exclusion is seen as covering a remarkably wide range of social and economic problems (Sen, 2000).Social exclusion as an expression was first developed by Lenoir (1979), complementary to the framework of labour market discrimination. Social exclusion and discrimination have become the central focus of discourse in India today. It refers to the process and outcome of keeping social groups outside power centres and resources. It is the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as society to realize their full potential. Economic capability, gender, age, caste and religion etc are the important variables which indicate exclusion from social and economic opportunities. One of the approaches to study social exclusion is to identify the groups that have been known to be in danger of being socially excluded on the basis of their specific attributes. By examining the mechanism of their exclusion, one can suggest possible ways of their inclusion in the development. Gender based discrimination and exclusion has been found the most common phenomenon across the globe. Various studies and research have been conducted in the areas concerning sexual division of work, discrimination in hiring, placements and promotions, differences in wages and earnings between men and women. Some studies have also focussed on differential rates of labour force and workforce participation by men and women, under-representation of women in workforce.

The Indian labour market is highly unfriendly to women. Although women constitute almost one half of the population, their share in the workforce is only one third. The literacy rate of female in India is 53.7% and gender gap is 25.7%, total adult female workers in the total persons employed are 19.3%. In the central government jobs, the percentage of female employment of total employment is 7.53%. The female headed households in India are 10.35% (Census of India, 2001).

According to the census data released in 2014, a whopping 160 million women in India, 88% of who are of working age (15 to 59 years), are confined to their homes performing 'household duties' rather than gainfully employed in the formal job sector. Three fourths of the women workers are in agriculture, a low- productivity and low income sector. A very small percentage of women are working in the modern and growing sectors of the economy. For example, only 0.08% of women workers are in utilities, 0.43% of women workers are employed in transport and communication sector. In the public sector only 16% of its employees are women. In the organised sector- both public and private together- only 20% of workers are women. In both the organised and unorganised sector, the employment women constitute about 30%. Only 11% of women workers as against 19% of men have regular jobs. A woman's chance of getting a regular job in the organised sector is 0.67 of a male worker and a women worker, on an average, earns 60% of the wage of a male worker (Papola and Sahu, 2012).

The report "Women on Boards" by Biz Divas, a national network of professional women and law firm Khaitan and Co, said that men hold 8,640 boardroom positions and women 350 in the country's 1,470 listed firms. India has two companies in the Fortune 500, Reliance Industries and Indian Oil, but only one of their total of 30 directors is a woman, the report said. Even though women achievers have earned admiration and respect in Indian society, gender- stereotyping results in most women facing clash between work and family life. Despite various efforts to build gender diversity in the workplace, corporate India still has only 4% of women at top management and board levels. Only 50% of women who graduate from business schools enter the workforce, says a CSR survey entitled "Women Managers in India- Challenges and Opportunities".

These figures clearly state the position of women in India. The present study is an attempt to discuss the factors responsible for exclusion of women and lastly suggest the ways to improve their position and provide them equal opportunities.

III. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

The factors which act as a barrier to the growth of women and prevent them from having equal opportunities range from the centuries old traditions, political factors and unemployment etc. Social role theory, gender stereotyping, family/work conflict,

lack of mentoring and the 'old boys' network' are all factors which make up the hypothetical 'social exclusion' that women face when trying to reach the most senior positions in their careers (Kelly and Paula, 2013). A lot of studies established the assumption of social exclusion and pointed out women experienced numeral barriers at some stage in their pronouncement of their career pathway (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women, when compared to men, are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2010). People who are successful managers have masculine characteristics such as direct and a toughie (Burton and Parker, 2010; Frey, James and Eitzen, 1991). When a woman acts as a leader and gives direction to the group, she is thought to be acting out of the norms of the society (Burton and Parker, 2010). People are unaccustomed in many organizational contexts to women possessing substantial authority that encompasses decision-making power (Eagly, 2005). McCarthy Kelly and Burn Paula (2013) identified a variety of reasons as to why it is believed that women face social exclusion when seeking promotion:

1. Social role and identity theory

2. Gender stereotyping and unconscious discrimination

3. Double Bind Hypothesis

4. Family-work conflict and women's confidence

5. Mentoring and Networking and the 'Old Boys Network'

6. Gender Differences in Leadership styles

These and all other factors proposed by various researches can be identified as follows:

- *Psychological Factors*: India is a nation where everybody believes that a woman's place is at home and she is not supposed to question men and accept all decisions taken by him. The voice of women has always been suppressed when it comes to decision making and this led to lack of confidence and self- esteem. Women have always been ignored in Indian society and they have accepted these rules as 'rules of thumb'. Women have always been considered as soft hearted, emotional and that's why they sometimes face betrayal in the society as well as workplace. They have also accepted that they are always meant to be stayed at home and not work.

- *Societal Factors:* Marriage remains the key institution around which Indian women's lives revolve and it has significant implications too. Around 60% of Indian girls are married by the time they are 18 and many are married by the age of 15 (Desai et al 2010). They are vested with the responsibilities of the house, husband, in-laws and their children and education and work thus takes the back seat. And for those who opt to work even after such responsibilities and duties, they are supposed to manage their personal and work- life on their own. This puts a lot of burden on them and their lives become unmanageable. Some women are even compelled to take a break from their career or education.

- *Education:* Education plays a pivotal role in the exclusion of particular groups. Although the attainment has been rising but a significant proportion still leaves school without attaining qualifications and basic skills. There could be a number of factors which influence educational attainment such as child and family characteristics, school factors and locality factors. Many girls are forced to do the household chores and leave their education. Many are forced to become labor or acquire jobs with minimal wages.

- *Organizational Factors:* Due to the stereotypes and pre-conceived notion, male employees cannot accept any female employee going up in the corporate ladder. They do not involve her in any of the informal group network and never let her take any decision for the group; instead decisions are imposed on her. Because of this, the women employee feels isolated and her morale goes down affecting her performance and the organization gets a reason to restrain her from any further

hikes or promotions. Sometimes organizations also do not heartily welcome the women employees who have come back from their leaves or career breaks and this leads to lack of enthusiasm on part of women employee.

- *Governmental Factors:* This includes the lack of keeping an eye on the law enforcement on behalf of the government, failing in data gathering for vivid scrutiny and insufficient reporting on the existence of unequal opportunities.

IV. MEASURES FOR INCLUSION OF WOMEN

The society, the government and the women group itself is doing a lot to help them over come such barriers. These includes formation of self-help groups, acts passed by government to give quota to women and creating awareness among women about the need for education and a job. The following measures can help women to overcome any discrimination and exclusion they face:

- *Education:* Education plays a greater role in creating the self-confidence and making the individual independent. They can take their own decisions and negotiate on their own terms. Educated individuals do not look for other's support. Government of India has launched many schemes such as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, National Literacy Mission Programme.

- *Promote Mechanisms that Gives Women a Voice in Politics and Governance:* These mechanisms can vary widely from proportional representation systems that increase the probability women will be elected, to more transparent political party selection processes and many more. Women in politics can strengthen the credibility of democracies through their participation and contribute to improved efficiency in policy-making by bringing their diverse perspectives. In India, there is a reservation of 33% seats in gram panchayats for women.

- *Enact and Implement Equal Economic Rights for All:* Legislation on equal pay for equal work, free choice of profession or employment, equality in hiring and promotions, freedom from sexual harassment in workplace and other critical rights are increasingly being promoted. But weak implementation of these laws continues to constrain women's equality and empowerment.

- *Mentoring and Personal Development Programs:* Women should be provided with strong mentoring and personal development programs that specifically address personal effectiveness in managing family and household demands while simultaneously climbing the proverbial corporate ladder. (Juliette Boone, 2013).

- *Creation of Self-Help Groups:* SHGs have been among the most successful programs geared to empowering women. These groups help the women in difficult times both emotionally financially. The government should recognize their importance and provide them with necessary assistance to make them more successful. For example, Priyadarshini is a program that offers women in several districts access to self-help groups.

- *Count and Acknowledge Women's Work:* The success stories of those women who have fought with the adverse conditions and become successful in their lives should be discussed on forums so that others can learn from them and choose their own paths.

V. CONCLUSION

Social exclusion and discrimination is driven by a complex array of demographic, psychological, societal and organizational factors that are interlinked. It is a phenomenon that has been in existence since ages and requires a lot of effort on the part of every group of the society to eradicate it completely. The response to exclusion is inclusion. This can worked out by identifying the mechanisms of exclusion and its outcomes on society.

With active mentorship, training, and support, barriers should be anticipated, identified, and navigate in the workplace successfully.

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