



Glass Ceiling in Indian Corporate Sector

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ABSTRACT

Women comprise a large segment of the available managerial talent across the globe, but their representation at top level managerial positions in business administration, is very low. The leadership prospect for women managers is a critical issue in gender equality and remains a researchable proposition. This paper tries to discuss the glass ceiling phenomenon and related aspects. Further, an attempt has also been made to pinpoint the factors contributing to low representation of women in management and the challenges faced by them across the countries in general and in India in particular.

KEYWORDS : Feminism, Glass Ceiling, Gender Discrimination, Professional, Societal Factors

Introduction

In the context of overall organized sector in India, the participation of women has increased over the last three decades. The increase is spread across various sectors. The corporate sector management in particular has seen an overall increase in women participation. This is because of the increase in trained female human resource for top management positions. Management institutes now offer courses to increase employability. Women's enrolment in professional courses has increased including the general graduate courses. But, still the percentage of women enrolment is not very significant. Unfortunately an unfair system of set of attitudes of preventing women from getting to the top is in existence. A glass ceiling is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that keeps a given demographic from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy. The term is typically applied to women. The metaphor was first coined by feminists in reference to barriers in the careers of high-achieving women. The first person to use the phrase was Marilyn London during a 1978 speech.

Global Existence of Glass Ceiling

The 'glass ceiling' faced by women exists across all countries and is most evident at higher executive levels, particularly at the most senior level where female chief executives are very rare (Oakley, 2000). A.P. Kottis's study conducted on women in management shows that despite the increase in the number of women intake in business schools only a small percentage of women are found in managerial positions and their entry into the managerial ranks is much lower compared to that of their male counterparts. Even when we look at an advanced country like UK, there is gender discrimination in the workplace. According to A. Eyring and B.A. Stread (1988) in the Metropolitan District Council situated in Yorkshire, UK where 66 per cent of the workforces were women, majority of them occupied the lower range of the white collar posts. Margaret Gibelman (2000) in his work on employees of 74 non-profit agencies throughout the United States indicates that females are overrepresented in direct-service position. His studies substantiate the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon among the agencies. He states that men are disproportionately represented in management, particularly upper-level management, and they earn higher salaries than women at all hierarchical levels of the organization.

In the USA and Australia there continues to be a significant difference in the number of men and women who reach senior management positions. However, it is not the case in the junior and middle management position. Talmud and Izraeli (1999) opine that the number of women is increasing at junior and middle management positions. Tharenou (1999) maintains that women in most countries plateau at lower to mid level management positions. Catalyst (1990), a consultant firm in women's employment surveyed CEOs and personnel officers at 1000 leading companies and found that women hold a quarter to half of management jobs at 22 per cent companies but they have less than 5 per cent of top

management spots. A recent update of the classic ILO study 'Breaking through the glass ceiling: Women in management' shows, that women's share of top positions remains low and the rate of progress discouraging. What the update revealed is that the number of women in top management jobs has only increased by between 1 and 5 per cent over the past five years in some 33 countries surveyed. Lind Wirth, Director of the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality states that only a handful of women are making headlines here and there as they break through, but statistically they represent a mere few per cent of top management jobs.

Indian Scenario

Koshal et al (2006) states that in India only 2 women per 100 economically active men take administrative and managerial positions in India. The Confederation of Indian Industry released a study "Understanding the Levels of Employment of Women in the Workplace in India" covering 149 large and medium size companies across regions, which highlights that women comprise 16 per cent at junior management level, 4 per cent each at middle and senior levels and only 1 per cent in organizational leadership positions (CEOs). According to the International Business Owners Survey (IBOS) 2004 by Grant Thornton, 42 per cent (59 per cent globally) of business in India include women in senior management positions, but women occupy 12 per cent (19 per cent globally) of the senior management posts available.

The ASSOCHAM study reveals that educated metros and large town females are opting for self-employment. Women are very well informed still denied promotions and better career prospects and amply face gender biases. It asserts that there is a need for a National Policy for promoting women in top levels of management. Only 3.3 per cent of women are elevated to key positions while 78.9 per cent continues to slog at humble positions and 17.7 per cent of them despite working very hard are able to end up their career at middle management cadre.

The Restricting Factors

There is a gradual increase in number of women in the managerial jobs across the countries. Increase in number in women's education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness about women's rights and need for supplementary incomes are some of the reasons. However there is still an under representation of women in managerial jobs not only in India but also across countries world over. Most of the women managers hold lower and middle management positions and the number of women remains extremely small in top management positions. The major barriers which restrict women to enter into managerial jobs are at individual, societal and organizational levels. Factors that restrict women managers to reach the top echelon are blocked opportunity, lack of support of employers, limited access to information, restricted access to training, marriage and motherhood, conflict between career and family responsibilities, prioritization of family over career, immobility of women and

stereotypical attitude towards women managers. In the organizational structures discrimination against women managers exist relating to remuneration, job allocation, performance appraisal, promotion, training opportunities and reward structures.

The ASSOCHAM study cites certain reasons as to why women lose out in their career. Those reasons are more to do with individual and societal factors that impinge on their career growth. It highlights that unlike men working women cannot stay on late at work and do networking and liaison, which helps in job promotions. Women resist mobility as they find it difficult to travel with home responsibilities and are not eager to take a transfer and job promotion for family reasons and remain satisfied with their current position. Health problems, gender discrimination and possessive husbands have been identified as other prominent factors obstructing growth prospects of career women. It emphasized that low proportion of women in high ranks may be a reflection of prejudices, discriminatory recruitment policies, or lack of career orientation and lack of career commitment of the part of women in general.

Conclusion

Historically, women in India have not enjoyed a good status in workplace settings whether in managerial operative roles. The biggest challenge they face today is balancing dual role of organizational managers and housewives and the differential treatment meted out to them at work, which upholds the centrality and superiority of men. Due to stereotypes they are offered less challenging jobs and are often not involved in tackling crucial organizational issues.

In India, although women have entered management since decades yet it is surprising to know that there is not government sponsored systematic data ascertaining the number of women in management in India. Women in the senior management positions are highly under-represented. Gender differences appear more deeply embedded in India than in Western societies which is very much apparent in the workplace. Therefore women's advancement in management profession is very low as compared to that of global average. We may conclude that there is dire need to take suitable initiatives by all the stakeholders!

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