

Bridging the Gender Bias to Foster Economic Growth in India

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Abstract: Women constitute a sizeable segment of any community. One half of the world's population comprises of women and girls and without their empowerment and engagement in the work force it is impossible to achieve economic recovery and face the upcoming global challenges. There has been a huge disparity in the women's participation in economic growth in India. The current status of gender disparities in corporate policies and other relative practices in India indicates persistent threat to the growth of women as a potential workforce and drivers of economic growth. The participation of women in labor force and as entrepreneurs has been low over the past decade despite of rapid economic growth due to various socio-economic and cultural factors including security issues and poor infrastructure. There has been high unemployment amongst educated women but if the job availability and working conditions improved more women will be able to contribute to economic growth. The gender wage gap is another factor which keeps women away from work. According to the latest report by McKinsey it has been proved that India could add 60% to 2025 GDP by bridging the gender gap at work. This paper examines the reasons for gender bias at workplace in India and its repercussions along with the steps that should be taken to overcome the barriers which reduce women's contribution in economic progress. Thus, the Indian policies will have to be framed to increase participation of women in labor force, reduce wage differentials and improve the working conditions to promote talented women in leadership and managerial roles and also enhance work-life balance through planned efforts. Women are the invisible driving force behind the Indian economic scenario and such policies will surely lay out a potential path for all inclusive economic growth.

Introduction:

The term "Gender Bias" literally accentuates on the disparity factor faced by women in India, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, professional. Gender biasing is not all must in any aspect of life. We are living in the age of science. Today's Indian women have that potential to live up to the expectations of organizations as well as families. Women always believe in the proper balance between the 2P's Factor i.e. personal life and professional life. They are always oriented towards the proper prioritization of work (career & ambition) and life (Family, pleasure, leisure, spiritual development & self).

The world economic forum's India gender Gap reviewed examines inequalities between men & women. They ranked 114th out of 134 countries measured. Female gender encompasses one half of the world's population & without their presence, empowerment and involvement, we cannot imagine achieving splendid economic recovery, nor efficiency to tackle global challenges, such as climate change, social welfare, education, standard living, and other conflicts.

Reasons for selecting this emerging topic, to showcase the women's impact in every sphere of life but the way she has gone under the scenario of compromise in every field. She has never capitulated herself in any work. This selected concerned topic tries to make an effort to showcase the biasing nature of organizations that is not at all worthy or partially accepted from the generalized view of the outer world.

Some Facts related with participation of Indian women in corporate world

- After childbirth every working woman gets 33% less than salary in compare to their male colleagues, and it continues for 12 years. (according to the Institute for fiscal studies, IFS, 2016).
- Indian women get 18.8% less salary than men, due to lack of representation in highest paying job function, it creates the gap of economic development to a greater extent. (Report by Korn Ferry Hay Group, 2016).
- In Gender Pay Gap India ranked 108th position in all over world. (Report by Korn Ferry Hay Group, 2016).
- If female participation rate will increase, India can boost its GDPⁱ by \$0.7 trillion in 2025 or 16 % of business as usual level (The power of parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, McKinsey Report, 2015).
- Women contribution in India's GDP is only 17% in comparison to the global average of 37% and has lowest among all regions in the world. (The power of parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, McKinsey Report, 2015).
- Women in India only represent 24% of the labour force compared with an average of 40% globally. (The power of parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, McKinsey Report, 2015).
- NSSO, 2015 indicates that women's labour force participation is significantly lower than men in both urban and rural areas. India's female labour force participation rate is just 21% in urban and 36% in rural areas compared with 76% and 81% of male participation.

- Though The world economic forum, ranked India on 68th position among 135 countries in WEF index 2013, Due to high participation of women in professional and technical occupation but on a same manner over 3 million women facing the problem of unemployment. (NSSOⁱⁱ, Employment and unemployment Survey, 68th round, 2012).
- While female working age populations rose(15 to 64 years) by 99 million, but female job grew only by 6 million between 2000 to 2012 (NSSO, Employment and unemployment Survey, 68th round, 2012)
- Women account for 6% of seats on corporate boards in the Asia Markets and 8% in executive committees, in comparison to 17% in US, 10% in Europe. (as per women matters: An Asian perspectives , Mckinsey Report, 2012)
- India has lowest female labor contribution rates in Asia and the world, due to educational opportunity and family responsibilities. Only 33% female workforce at junior level, compared with 55% in china (said by women matters: An Asian perspectives, Mckinsey Report, 2012).
- In India, it is unfortunate that in B.S.E. 500 companies only 5.3 % female holding directorship positions, which shows huge gap in gender diversity. (ET Report, March 8, 2011)
- Only 14% of the companies questioned have 40% or more women among their employees. Most company does not track salary gaps, despite the clear wage gaps between women and men. (As per the World Economic Forum's India Gender Gap Review, 2009).
- India has 93% of its health gender gap, 84% of its education gap, 41% of its economic participation gap and 27% of the political empowerment gender gap and ranked 114th out of 134 countries, as per Global Gender Gap report, 2009.

Why Female Participation Matters in Indian Corporate:

1. Economic Factor:

Measuring growth effects of greater female economic contribution is complex. Per capita GDP is fixed by the labour productivity, availability of capital, hours worked per employed, the employment rate and working age population. A number of studies have simply assumed that change in GDP is directly related to a change in the labour force participation rate for women (Matsui, 2005).

A female participation can boost India economic case if it increases their number at all level of labour force. As India can achieve prospective growth and could add 60% of women contribution in 2025 India's GDP by bridging gender gap at workⁱⁱⁱ. Women represent half of the human capital of India and policies need to be integrated them into economy in order to improve India's long term competitive potential.

2. Talent Management:

Organizations that unsuccessful to attract talented women are penalizing themselves by decreasing the best talent pool in their

organization. There are no differences in leadership, team management and managerial skills between female and male candidates. Capture high talented women is better for the organization to get competitive advantage. Today Females are successfully managing their both 2Ps factor i.e. Professional and personal life and giving equal competition to their male colleagues. Organizations are also recognizing their ability to manage work challenges and providing equal environment where female can give their best performance.

The need to recruit and maintain the best female candidates within the corporations are to sustain good relationship with female clients or they want more female insight to know consumer buying patterns.

In 2007, Mckinsey research also said that companies with the highest proportions of women in senior management positions reported enhanced organizational and financial performance.^{iv}

3. Gender Diversity to develop ecosystem

Higher female candidates in management are likely to require by the governments, the wider business community and individual companies. Moving forward on gender diversity in corporate or other institution is very essential to get economic opportunities and sustain development goals. India Inc is aggressively trying to improve gender diversity at the top management level by hiring women executives.^{vii} . It would be nice to have diversity as a natural progression rather than imposed need because balancing work and home is no longer prototype only for women, men are also asking for time off their families.

Companies and governments need to raise the awareness of this issue and forms such polices and standards which support foot falling of women in corporate world. The business community should act as role model in order to shift attitudes and build momentum to change mindset to improve female representation at every level of work.

A set of gender diversity initiatives, implemented in the right combination, will help greater numbers of talented women rise through ranks and deliver appropriate business benefits.

Upgrade the image of country by improving the status of women

Due to global pressure and advocacy, India try to address the issue of status of Indian women and girls and started initiatives like " **Beti Bachao aur Beti Pado**", **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013**, **women helpline**, **Recognition and Awards for Women Achievers**, **Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)**, **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh**:

A wider view of education is needed and should undoubtedly include physical, social and political circumstances in which girls are living. Many measurements need to be taken to give a tangible

shape to these government campaigns to improve the girl's position. If India is able to address these issues and provide better opportunity, atmosphere, safety, training and motivation, it will automatically improve the status of women. Without raising women status, India cannot mark as successful democratic country in front of global world and not able to achieve real and sustain economic growth.

Barriers to Gender Diversity or Gender Equality at work place:

Governments, corporate and individual business entities need to understand the obstacles for gender diversity within the corporate world. They are as follows:

- Dual role conflict (balancing professional and personal life responsibilities)
- Lack of family policy or support services(example: child care)
- Anytime and anywhere performance model(availability and geographical mobility at all the time)
- Absence of female role model.
- Female are less motivate to get promotion and lower ambitious than male.
- Choice of work and atmosphere to recognize their capabilities.
- Attitudes behavior of male candidates, seeing them as less productive and emotional fool.
- Female are reluctant to make network with male colleagues.
- Perceive wage gap for similar work.
- There are less legal rights and protection against violence or sexual harassment at work place.
- Lack of women development program and workshop to widen their leadership and managerial skills
- Lack of efficient communication system within organization.
- Lack of team atmosphere in which everyone is encouraged to participate in decision making.
- Education, sex ratio birth and child marriage are also society level causes which play a major role to increase the gap of gender diversity.
- No time for personal growth, major time spend on unpaid care work.
- Social institution, religious attitudes and cultural reduce female participation at work place.

Initiatives to bridge the gap of gender diversity:

Mckinsey identified following measures and initiatives that can improve the gender diversity system at corporate world^{vii}:

1. Management Commitments:

- The CEO and executives team support gender diversity and set the targets for the number of senior women in the organizations.
- Make the strategic agenda to secure the place for women representatives.
- Make an awareness of gender diversity issues.

2. Women development program:

- Networking programs
- Leadership skill-building program
- External coaching programs
- Mentoring programs with internal mentors
- Programs to increase proportion of potential women leaders.

3. A set of enablers: This includes to identify inequalities and track improvements, Hr processes and policies to support gender diversity mechanism:

- Start women's progress program by the company
- Gender equality program at overall job level.
- Try to decrease wage gap issues.
- Work satisfaction level by gender.
- Increase participation rates in training program.
- Improve attrition rates.
- Participation rates in mobility program by gender.
- Conquer gender biases in recruiting.
- Gender target recruiting program.
- Process to conquer gender biases in appraisals.
- Adopt flexible working.
- Regular interaction program with HR to define career path.
- Schedule meeting only during working hours.
- Guarantee to keep similar or better position when returning from leaves or smooth move before, during and after maternity leave.
- Process to retain talented women employees, who may want to leave.
- Internal quotes for women in managerial positions.

4. Infrastructure:

- Office concierge system.
- Office sponsored home concierge system.
- In house or external child care and elder care facilities.
- Job search program for spouse or partner.

Apart from Mckinsey suggested initiatives following matters also take care to improve gender diversity issues:

5. Country legislation that addresses domestic violence and sexual harassment, physical security and autonomy (child marriage, violence, sex ratio at birth), women have right to inherit property, obtain national identity and protection against discrimination.
6. Lower the barriers to job creations.
7. Expanding the reach of financial and digital services to enables women entrepreneurs.

8. Reshaping deep rooted attitudes about the role of women in work and in society.

Conclusion:

To maintain sustainable development process, women participation and access at work place are very important. It is also necessary to invest women's full economic potential in corporate world and other working areas, to obtain economic growth and productivity. Moreover, reducing gender barriers at work place is the first steps to promote women's economic empowerment. In India, gender inequalities are not only entrenched into socio-culture but also found in Indian policies and institutional frameworks that ruined the employment opportunities of female work force. Female continue to face many obstacles to entering in corporate world to start their career path and goals like family responsibilities, safety issues, gender biasness, lack of skills and opportunities, limited mobility. Women faced a range of multiple challenges related with work or job; working atmosphere, security, gender gap, wages gap, discrimination, work life balance, glass ceiling, choice of work or occupation segregation (narrow range of working sector) etc, which stop the female enthusiasm to achieve successful career.

Indian women also engaged informal economy where their exposure to risk of exploitation is high and they have least formal protection. At the same time their work is also not noticed and subsequently under reported. All above reasons, policy makers and intervention should tackle a range of issues to promote working women and girls in India and encouraging private sector to develop job opportunities for women bridge gender gaps at work place

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ⁱ GDP: Gross Domestic Product

ⁱⁱ NSSO: National Sample Survey office

ⁱⁱⁱ The power of parity :advancing women's equality in India

^{iv} Women matters 2 "female leadership, a competitive edge for the future"

^{vi} ET Bureau Mar31, 2015

^{vii} Mckinsey's women matter 2010 reports