Career Impediments for Women in India

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Abstract

Despite tremendous progress in educational level and capacity building in women in India, their careers is prone and in most cases succumb to either to traditional mindset in male dominated society or work culture at organizations. The study deals with the problems faced by Indian women in furthering their career and suggest means to bridge harmony between traditional domestic duties and modern challenges in working environment. The study also suggests measures to end this burning conflict issue of interface between domestic duties and challenges at work places of women.

India began to implement trade liberalization measures from 1992. The economy has grown-the GDP growth rate ranged between 5 and 7 percent annually over the period. Different sectors of economy have different experiences about the impact of the reforms. In a country like India, productive employment is central to poverty reduction strategy and to bring about economic equality in the society. With governmental and other efforts, women are encouraged to join hands in hands with their male counterparts in this endeavour. But the effect of unfettered encouragement to women is not always equitable in India, rather at a disadvantageous state still persists and women remain a vulnerable group in this arena. Indian women are entering the organized workforce in large numbers – across industries and especially in urban India. Many young Indian women are the first women in their families to take up full-time formal employment; at the same time, working women in India face tremendous pressures as they climb the ladder at work – from social pressures to get married and have children early to rigid workplace structures that force women to drop out before they reach their potential.

India is a multifaceted society where no generalization could apply to the entire nation's various regional, religious, social, and economic groups. Nevertheless, certain broad circumstances in which Indian women live affect the ways they participate in the economy. Apart from performing a main dual role of single handily bringing up children and of a home maker, myriad factors act as barrier for women in their career and its advancements. Indian society is extremely hierarchical with virtually everyone ranked relative to others according to their caste (or caste-like group), class, wealth, and power. This ranking even exists in areas where it is not openly acknowledged, such as certain business settings. Though specific customs vary from region to region within the country, there are different standards of behaviour for men and women that carry over into the work environment. Women are expected to be chaste and especially modest in all actions that may constrain their ability to perform in the workplace on an equal basis with men. Another related aspect of life in India is that women are generally confined to home thus restricting their mobility and face seclusion. The women face constraints beyond those already placed on them by other hierarchical practices. These cultural rules place some Indian women, particularly those of lower caste, in a paradoxical situation: when a family suffers economically, people often think that a woman should go out and work, yet at the same time the woman's participation in employment outside the home is viewed as "slightly inappropriate, subtly wrong, and definitely dangerous to their chastity and womanly virtue". When a family recovers from an economic crisis or attempts to improve its status, women may be kept at home as a demonstration of the family's morality and as a symbol of its financial security. As in many other countries, working women of all segments of Indian society faces various forms of discrimination including

sexual harassment. Even professional women find discrimination to be prevalent: two-thirds of the women in one study felt that they had to work harder to receive the same benefits as comparably employed men.

Women Education after Independence

Women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate. The constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian women without discrimination. The literacy rate before independence was 2.6% rose in 1961 to 15.3% and 50% by the year 2001. And now, according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14 while female literacy rate is 65.46. Kerala and Mizoram are the only states in India that have achieved universal female literacy rates. The improvement in social and economic status of women is said to be one of the reasons for literacy. In cities the literacy rate is almost equal between girls and boys in the country however the rate in rural areas continues to be less than the boys. 40% of the centres under NFE, non formal education programs are set apart for women. According to statistics of women education in India, today 0.3 million NFE centres have primary education to 0.12 million girls out of 7.42 million children. However in tribal areas there is not much of a gender bias as compared to all other castes, tribal community statistics show lower male ratio in spite of much low income, literacy, education and other facilities several efforts are being made towards women education and empowerment. The government is taking steps to increase the rate of women education and employment.

Causes of impediments of career of women in India

Women constitute almost half of the population in the India. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the country. Some of the reasons are summarised as below

1. Women have to balance work and family responsibilities
2. Women are seen as less committed to work because they often have family commitments
3. Lack of senior or visibly successful female role models
4. Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities
5. Personal style differences
6. Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's aspirations
7. for promotion
8. Lack of mentoring
9. Women are not given the same opportunities as men to work in high risk/high reward areas
10. Exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence
11. Failure of line mangers to see women's advancement as their responsibility
12. Lack of line manager skills in managing equality and diversity
13. Senior management are not committed to gender equality/diversity
14. Inhospitable organisational culture
15. Women lack experience of the different areas of the organisation
16. Discrimination by supervisors/line managers at point of promotion
17. Women lack awareness of organisational politics
18. Backlash from team who do not see themselves as benefiting from equality and diversity initiatives
19. Women are not made aware of development and promotion opportunities within the organisation
20. Bullying and harassment
21. Women lack access to training and development
22. Women often lack or do not have what it takes to get into management

Recommendations:

Changing the mindset:

This requires change at two levels at home and at work place. The hegemonic masculine ideology made the women suffer a lot and they were denied equal opportunities. The frame of mind and

attitude is required to be changed, both at work place and at home in respect of capability of woman and potential of womenfolk to do any work at par with their counterparts, men folk. This change if mindset shall be additionally supplemented with the propagation and implementation of idea that for household works, men have equally responsible and they must discharge this obligation in earnest. This requires lot of efforts at Governmental and other level.

Raising awareness

Effective diversity programmes require all employees to recognise the need for change and become involved. In particular, engaging women is recognised as an important pre requisite for successful change. This bridging of gulf between men and women's experiences at work is responsibility of employers. The stereotyping of women for particular works only not only should be discouraged but there is urgent need of penal action in this regard. This will help to get men involved in changing culture too.

Set targets

The tardy pace of change over the last few decades desires much to be done in case of women working their way up the pipeline and into the board room. Many of the barriers require behavioural changes, awareness raising and sharing best practice. Organisations are caught in a vicious circle: there are not sufficient numbers of women at senior levels to force a change of culture and behaviour and whilst the prevailing culture presents barriers to women's progression, there are unlikely ever to be. Targets are a way of breaking out of this circle and forcing the pace of change. Meaningful targets for the recruitment, retention and development of women will send a clear message that diversity is a on this issue which should be measured, accounted for and remunerated in the same way as in other business, developmental and other issues involving reforms.

Developing leadership

Leaders play a key role in setting the pace of change. Leaders need to be vocal and visible in their support of defying to unacceptable behaviours. Even more importantly they must display more inclusive leadership behaviours such as recognising the strategic importance of women to the career building, being open to change,

valuing people and valuing difference, being aware of their own unconscious biases, and being able to inspire and lead other women from front to do the same.

Encouraging role models

Leaders also have an important part to play in finding and supporting female role models. The lack of female role models reflects a lack of women at the top. But there can also be reluctance among those women who have made it to speak up. Leaders can help with the latter issue by personally inviting women to play a more active role to eradicate gender biasness in organisations and publically supporting their decision to do so.

Tackling unconscious bias

Tackling unconscious bias in organisations can be a powerful knob for change. It allows organisations to move away from polarised and negative attitude about discrimination. It also encompasses developing people, valuing individuals championing diversity and strategic diversity focus.

Finding mentors and sponsors

Lack of mentoring emerges as a key barrier. Women should have mentors who should act as coaches, providing a sounding board, acting as sponsors and take responsibility for championing their advancement as an institution. Mentoring schemes could be more effective if they were assessed according to the success or failure of senior male mentors in supporting their women mentees into senior positions.

Giving women a voice

There is a range of evidence from employers that creating spaces for women to speak about their experiences within an organisation can be transformative in developing understanding and changing attitudes. Reverse mentoring programmes for example, enable senior managers to personalise their understanding of the barriers that more junior colleagues from underrepresented groups face.

Providing women with a platform

Women have the skills and competencies to progress into senior leadership positions. However often they just don't get noticed. For women with agile working patterns, visibility is even more problematic. Providing women with a platform to demonstrate their abilities is vital. Mentors acting

as sponsors can help with this. Encouraging women to get involved in extracurricular activities to raise their profile is also important. Women's networks have a role to play, where they provide the chance for women to meet and work with senior leaders they would otherwise not come into contact with. Most important however is to make sure that diversity and balance is considered when managers are allocating work and pulling together project teams. Agile workers in particular often miss out on high profile opportunities. Providing managers with support and guidance to manage agile working effectively so that all team members contribute and can be recognised is vital. It is a clear expression and willingness to challenge those who regularly sideline female talent.

Mainstreaming agile working

Balancing work and family remains the top barrier for women. Primary responsibilities of women still remain managing care and domestic arrangements. However there are some signs that this is changing, though quite. Though in very insignificant proportion men, of late, have started to take on more of these responsibilities in India. Employers are also required to radically change their attitude to agile and flexible working. Organisations are also required to entrenched organized agile, shifting focus from jobs to tasks and from individuals to teams. This will promotes clarity and transparency about the way that work is organised and will provide managers with far more flexibility of resourcing. This approach, which recognises that many employees can and

should work flexibly with identified task oriented, offers the best chance of moving flexible working away from "the Egyptian Mummy Track" to a new way of working that offers better results for both individuals and employees.

Conclusion:

It is demoralizing that from a woman's perspective that the barriers to her progression in career are so intrinsically inherent and embedded in our society and country. Many men, at home and at work place, just don't understand what it feels like to be a woman at work. Men and Women are just like the two wheels of a chariot. They are equal in importance and they should work together in life. The one is not superior or inferior to other. Without men actively involved in dismantling these barriers and challenging the preconceptions and stereotypes which hinder women's progression, little will change. The top barrier to progression remains balancing work and family. It is depressing that women still pay career, as penalty for having a family. Some will cite "choice" and suggest that sacrificing progression at work for a family life is an acceptable trade off but it is one that leaves organisations and the India as a whole poorer. The implications of failing to address this issue go far beyond the disappointments and frustrations of these women's careers. We risk wasting the talents of another generation of women in India. However a thoughtful change in men's mindset and work culture, will weed out the barrier in career progress of women.

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