ABSTRACT

‘If the number of female workers were to increase to the same level as the number of men, GDP in the United States would expand by 5 per cent, by 9 per cent in Japan, and by 27 per cent in India, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated.’ (Mehra, P., Sept.7th, 2015, The Hindu). The reason that despite an available resource pool, there are very few women at the top, and when challenges like organisational gender dynamics are in place, whether legislation is the way out, and whether the idea of the ‘glass ceiling’ as understood and accepted is applicable to the Indian scenario, and what are the core issues, are some of the issues highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: Women Managers; Gender Mainstreaming; Glass Ceiling; Discrimination; Dynamics; Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Management as a concept can be said to compose of several hues, with layers of factors constantly interacting with each other in a dynamic fashion. ‘Managing within the private sector reflects the corporate interest in finance gain, but management can also be based on social principles.’ (Maddock S., 1999, pg.33) It is here that the gender aspect of this arena comes into play when the processes being carried on within any company are assessed on the grounds of gender neutrality. Not just in determining the form of organisation and success rate of the business, management of any company has a significant role to play in its transformation which undoubtedly has its effects on the people associated with it and the society at large. The participation of women thus becomes crucial as we are talking here not just about the people in managerial positions but management at large.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum”, the global report for International Labour Organisation (ILO) prepared by Wirth-Dominice, emphasises on the fact that “promoting gender equality at the work place is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.(Wirth-Dominice,2015.pp.iii)” this report focusses on the aspect concerning the optimum utilisation of human resource available in the form of women managers, which is often remains unexploited due to a plethora of reasons. Interesting statistics and information from this report, which is also reliable coming from ILO, goes a long way in helping one understand why the advancement of women in business and upper echelons of management is important and how it is often not achieved.
The contribution of women in growth of an economy can be estimated at a number of different levels, national level and at the enterprise level, being the two most important ones. The report shows how the “glass ceiling” which prohibits women from reaching the top is a common phenomena across the world in business circles. Elusive gender partialities are not a thing of the past and is very much prevalent in today’s developed world as well. Labour markets separated on the basis of gender is one of the most important restraints in overall economic development.

‘Challenging Women: Gender, Culture and Organisation,’ by Maddock is an interesting piece of work offering a fundamental re-examination of managerial powers for modification and obstacles come across by the ‘challenging women’ - senior women managers who are given the duty of changing their organisations for the better. This book acknowledges the fact that there exist a number of opinions about inequitable service practices. This is an important work which throws light on the connections between gender, innovation and organizational transformation, with a universal appeal taking into its ambit all types of organisations wherein women managers are involved.

“Corporate Governance in Listed Entities- Amendments to Clauses 35B and 49 of the Equity Listing Agreement.” Securities and Exchange Board of India Circular”, the original Government of India document came in use to understand the bare laws laid down by SEBI in context of incorporating women managers in the top rung of business organisations, making a base on which an understanding could be developed regarding the need for a compulsory legislative measure to bring about equality.

‘Glass Ceilings or Gendered Institutions? Mapping the Gender Regimes of Public Sector Worksites,’ by Raewyn Connell is an essay which highlights how the current methods employed to bring about gender equality have their flaws. The author bats for a ‘multi-dimensional approach’ for gender mainstreaming in higher management. To develop an understanding for the same and comprehend organisational gender arrangements the essay takes some Australian public sector organisations. The results show the existence of gender based labour division unfavourable to women, the causes and effects of such observations are explored. The idea of the “depolarised work space” is investigated keeping cultural trends in mind. With gender neutrality at the workplace as the objective, the essay gives valuable inputs as to how public institutes can evaluate and improve their gender systems.

“Mainstreaming Gender in Global Public Policy,” by True is a work dedicated to studying the factors that promoting mainstreaming of gender, not just at national levels, but at international organisations as well. The author acknowledges how any type of public policy which is globally acceptable needs and is assisted by feminist research and gender specific policies. The author also highlights the questions that emerge in this context, like the extent to which equality between the genders in the workspace impacts the process of policy making and the transformation of policy results. A current feminist perspective in relation to the pros and cons of this type of mainstreaming is also explored.

‘State Feminism and Political Representation,’ by Lovendusky is a diversion from the management arena as this piece of work deals with power dynamics and women in a situation to have powerful political influences. Although this book does not specifically focus on management, it makes one have a clear understanding of the idea of ‘participation’ of women in the whole concept of gender mainstreaming, and what the associated limitations are.

“Integrating Gender: Women, Law and Politics in the European Union,” Hoskyns is a study of women’s rights and the associated policies in the European Union, the base of which lies in feminist theories. Original interviews as a source of information form a striking primary source in this work.

**OBJECTIVES**

Objectives of the study:

1. To highlight how gender disparity affects top circles in management of a firm across nations.
2. To examine the reasons for absence of women managers at the top.
3. To find possible methods to address issues of gender mainstreaming in the concerned area.
Women as Managers

With the prevalent ideas of women being better at communication, multi-tasking, handling people and situations, women managers with the essential technical skills and their inherent characteristics not only prove more efficient, but more enterprising too. ‘Women managers, on average, were judged more effective and satisfying to work for as well as more likely to generate extra effort from their people. Women were also rated higher than men on three of the four components comprising transformational leadership. Such female leaders were rated as having more idealised influence or charisma, being inspirational and individually considerate than their male counterparts.’ (Bass and Avolio 1993:10; Maddock 1999, pg.33) However, the ILO Report on ‘Women in Business and Management’ has a different story to tell in terms of the data that they have on senior and middle-level managers who are women with no country in the survey except the Dominican Republic crossing the 50% mark. (Wirth-Dominice, 2015.pg. 21. 2012 Data.) The report highlights how gender balance in business is considered good for it, and yet there are very few women at top. Several studies conducted have found out the negative repercussions of an all-men decision making board. Women being concentrated in certain managerial functions rather than given a broader role are an alarming trend, where age-old gender stereotypes have a prominent role to play too. ‘There is plenty of evidence of the benefits to business of tapping into the talent pool that women represent – including being in tune with a consumer market increasingly driven by women, benefiting from the innovation and creativity that gender diversity can bring, improving corporate governance and, as a result, enhancing company outcomes.’ (Wirth-Dominice, 2015. pg.17).this alarming trend, as is evident from the ILO report is not just limited to a few exceptional countries, but to most of the countries that were studied. With women constantly striving to reach the top, why is the available female talent pool underutilised and how this issue can be overcome is thus the question.

Is Legislation The Solution?

Recently, the Securities and Exchange Bureau of India has made it mandatory that all listed companies should have at least one woman Director on their Boards. ‘The Board of Directors of the company shall have an optimum combination of executive and non-executive directors with at least one woman director....’ (49.II.A.SEBI, 2014, pg.9). A major point of concern is the coercive nature of this amendment, this fact being backed by repeated warnings of SEBI to the listed companies, which have been required to send responses to SEBI in terms of their progress in this particular direction, since a deadline has been fixed. Undoubtedly the amendment has welfare of women in management as its goal since this is an action taken as a consequence of observation of the fact that according to official records of stock exchanges, almost one third of the top five hundred listed companies do not have any woman on their Boards. But a legislation like this is merely addressing the tip of the iceberg since many of these companies have incorporated family members of promoters in order to comply to the norms within the deadline. The whole purpose of gender mainstreaming for which this amendment was made therefore gets a blow in the form of the perpetual existence of the theoretical ‘glass ceiling’ still being present for talented women. The whole idea of women being discriminated against when it comes to getting higher positions in the corporate hierarchy not taking into consideration their ability, knowledge and achievements, this ‘glass ceiling’ which seems to be unbreakable except for a handful few, is not an issue which can be sorted by one amendment In the form of inclusion of one woman member in the Board. It is not just a question of representation that we are looking at here. It is a multi-layered issue concerned with gender mainstreaming with a major focus on skill development and gender equality, gender equality essentially being a frame of mind which can be reset by training and not by laws. On the other hand, at the top levels of management and administration, in spite of equal opportunity measures, there are several other complexes that result in lack of gender equity. Understanding gender arrangements is one step forward. While the glass-ceiling theory itself has been challenged on a variety of grounds based on the ‘equal opportunity and antidiscrimination measures’ (Connell, 2006. pg.1) being in place at least on paper if not in practice, ‘Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995) rightly observe that the way we think about gender is a key to the way we act on gender reform. The
metaphors of “barrier,” “glass ceiling,” and “glass wall” arise from a particular way of thinking about gender inequality in the public realm.’ (Connell, 2006. Pg.1.). What has to be understood is that macro-policies at the top levels of management cannot be formulated just as a reaction to the facts observed in terms of gender bias in acquiring high positions in management.

Reality Closer Home

The authors while going through statistics of the topic under consideration, came across some interesting insights given in the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) , which is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, Government of India, started in 2011. An exhaustive survey done by this government agency for the period of 2014-15 throws some thought-provoking facts.

From a total population of 141045558 (2014-15) in the 18 to 23 year age bracket across all states and across all caste categories, the age when professional courses are pursued by students, the number of women was found to be 67830105. An analysis of the data giving information on the state-wise enrolment of students in the above mentioned age group in higher education institutions, across all categories of government, private and government aided, shows that a total of just 3809322 students got enrolled in the post-graduation courses of which 1961671 were female candidates. Trying to delve deeper into the issue, an analysis of Gross Enrolment Ratio was done across the Indian states for the same sample and it was found out to be 22.7 for females as compared to 24.5 for males. The disparity did not create a problem unless the data provided by the top management institutions in India were studied. The Gender Parity Index in higher education which comes out to be 0.91 for women does not show the real picture prevalent at management institutions. According to the IIM-A official institute statistics provided by the them, the number of females enrolled there is miserably low in their PGP courses. In the batch 2005-07, there was a meagre 14.85 percent of women candidates. The trend continued in following batch with 19.19 percent. The enrolment rate hovered around the same figures for a long time with an exception in 2014-16 batch with enrolment close to 30%. Undoubtedly, at their personal level, women are leaving no stone unturned with working hard at entering these top institutions. “Of the total 394 students admitted in the two-year course, as many as 116 girls have registered at the institute. Compared to last year, the number of women students has increased by nearly 8% this year. The 2013-15 batch of 380 students had 82 girls, that is 21.58%. Also, women representation has almost tripled since the 2011-13 batch of 372 students comprising 11.02% girls (Rana,N. 2014).”

With management institutions planning on using a number of measures like relaxing the cut off marks for women candidates in order to get a larger number of female students, what is important to understand and question here is the fact that how far this technical training from the best institutes in the country would take these women to the top of whatever organisations they wish to work for as long as gender based inequality is prevalent in the work scenario.

The facts themselves hint at three major issues: first, the unavailability of skill that is required at that level among women due to low enrolment in technical courses related to management; secondly, lack of opportunity to the appropriate women candidates in terms of restrictions posed by absence of agency and facilities that might help them balance the stereotypical notions of “responsibility” on the domestic and social front; and thirdly, the dynamics of gender relations that are entrenched in the psyche of fellow male/female workers as well as the seniors. In this context, the ideas of Barbara Harris-White and Diane Elson, with regards to women empowerment which emphasises upon understanding the gendering of policy in order to convert it in a form that functions in a more gender-equitable manner (Pearson & Jackson, 1998) is important to consider. For gender mainstreaming in business and corporate circles, efforts have to be made from ground level itself.

Addressing the second issue of lack of opportunity, it is understood that this particular issue has to be addressed from the grass-root level starting by ensuring very basic initiatives like credit availability, supporting reproductive choice, and creating such opportunities which essentially require a more
feminine outlook to be dealt with, among others. When we talk of agency here, we need to understand that gender neutrality invariably incorporates the segregation of problems based on respective genders, in this case, women, and finding solutions to these problems keeping the various aspects of the concerned gender in mind.

CONCLUSION

The basic idea should not be to compel companies to give high positions to women, as in that case it would be a form of consolation; what is essential is addressing the aforementioned issues in terms of providing appropriate educational, professional and skill development opportunities, so that the companies are obligated to give positions on the high rungs of the corporate ladder to able women in lieu of their professional expertise and their exceptional competence in comparison to their male counterparts.

This is not to say that issues concerning gender bias should be overlooked, they should definitely be addressed with a very determined mind-set both in terms of legislation and practice. What is emphasised here is the requirement of dealing with the issues concerning gender discrimination at the top levels of management under a broadened perspective of gender mainstreaming.

REFERENCES


