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Best Practices For Equal Employment Opportunities For Women In The Indian IT Industry

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ABSTRACT:
Indian constitution encapsulates social safeguard measures for all citizens of India in Article 15 and Article 16. Article 15 mandates prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The main objective of this paper is to explore and compare the various types of EEO programs and processes in IT organizations in Pune City, with special reference to providing equal employment opportunities to women. Organizations that provide employment opportunities for people from different backgrounds like race, sex, national origin, etc., are often seen as more progressive. The study is a systematic review of literature and also highlights the changing levels of participation of women in the Indian IT sector.

Keywords: best practices, EEO, Equal Employment Opportunities, Indian IT Firms.

1. INTRODUCTION

When compared with other industries that have been entrenched in North American society for decades, such as diversified financial institutions (27.1%) and publishing/printing (24.1%), how can one explain the low level of participation of women (8.2%) in the IT sector? Taking the example of the United States, where women seem to enjoy greater social and economic freedoms, what is the situation in a developing country like India, where gender roles are more deeply embedded and the socio-economic status of women remains much less than that of men?

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) the labor force participation of women has improved much in countries like India, but statistics show that still only 50 percent of women participate in the labor market. If only 30 percent of women intended to work, then there would be a surplus of 70 million female job seekers than men.

One reason why there is not such a severe gender gap in India compared with other developing countries can be attributed to the dominance of male entrepreneurs and especially men who control all the financial and business power structures in both male- and female-dominated public and private organizations. This can result in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices in the womens' domain, which is further explored in this paper.

The gender gap is not restricted to some sectors of the economy. Some large organizations appear to be more progressive than others, where women are highly represented within them, but this may not be conclusive evidence of equality. The responsibility for eliminating discrimination begins with CEOs and understanding how these leaders are influenced by the organizational culture. One of the most important factors affecting organizational culture is whether or not there are clear policies promoting equal opportunities for women employees. For example, gender bias may occur when employers fire females at a higher rate than males with similar performance ratings because they are perceived as being less competent, e.g. for

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

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not performing as well, for being pregnant, for being married, etc. Another means of gender discrimination is sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers may respond to complaints about sexual harassment by engaging in behavior that prevents women from filing complaints or complaining properly.

The study is a systematic review of literature and also highlights the changing level of participation of women in the Indian IT sector. By relieving the relevant literature, main objective of this paper is to explore and compare the various types of EEO programs and processes in IT organizations in Pune City, with special reference to providing equal employment opportunities for women.

2. Review of Literature

India has had one of the fastest growing economies in the world during the last decade. However, this growth is often closely linked with India's failure on some social indicators such as women's access to health care and education (Petersen-Leary et al. 2002).

A study conducted by sociologists suggests that women face considerable difficulties in entering the IT sector because the stereotype of the masculine "computer geek" is pervasive within this sector. Since most men are visual creatures and tend to look at computer screens more than women, there is a tendency to perceive women as less competent computers users even though they may be equally competent visual users (Erlwein , 1999).

Clearly, women work in the IT sector in India, both in the highly publicized call centers and in the higher-skilled production areas of IT. Kelkar and Nathan (2002) note that the growing service industry has had beneficial economic effects on both genders in India, stating that "the spread of IT-enabled services has been immensely beneficial to both women and men, especially those with limited skills or limited resources to acquire higher education." According to the Indian Institute of Technology, monthly wages range from Rs 5000 to Rs 15,000 (p. 433). Although both men and women benefit from participation in the IT sector, there is evidence suggesting these benefits exist on a gender-based continuum. An article in India Today (Chengappa and Goyal, 2002) provides a glimpse of how gender roles are perpetuated. An in-depth look at call centers in India in "Housekeepers to the World." The cover and the photos of customer service workers featured primarily women. In contrast, photo ops involving a high-ranking position, such as chairman or president, involved older men. As discussed in this article, it was men who were presented as leaders of the industry as well as experts when it came to discussing future growth and challenges. On the other hand, none of the women interviewed held a position higher than that of an entry-level worker. A female vice president was the only exception to this rule. The company she worked for trained women on how to be effective customer service representatives. The owner of a call center and agent for influencing policies regarding the development of this industry was not directly in a position of power. According to the article, women are to be seen, but not to participate actively in decision-making processes. Call center employment does not necessarily change the status of women within the household because call center employment is given a secondary status within the IT industry, Kelkar et al. (2002) state.

As Mansell and Wehn (1998) warn, women have begun entering higher-skilled technical occupations, including software development, "but the terms of contract, wages, training, health, and safety are often very poor" (p. 249). Women are marginalized in every nation in the world (Webster, in Mansell and Wehn: 251), and relegated to lower skill and income levels of the production of information technology.

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11 , Iss 8, Dec 2022

However, there are some groups who argue that women enjoy a monopoly in the Indian IT sector, meaning they have been able to negotiate their own pay levels. Women from the lower classes seem to have more autonomy in comparison with high-class women. In fact, poor rural girls often move from small towns with no modern education facilities to cities in search of better prospects, however most of these girls have little choice but to work as domestic servants or factory workers or in menial jobs.

In India men and women do not experience a wage gap until a job is identified as a 'women's job'. These types of jobs tend to be lower paid and involve less skilled positions. The Indian government has set out guidelines to address these issues, which have included gender sensitization training for both employers and employees. The hope is that this will allow the Indian workforce to be able to compete on an equal level with the international market place. There are however, some problems that still exist within the sector due to lack of government intervention. For example, despite the introduction of guidelines, it is still quite difficult for women to negotiate higher pay rates in comparison with their male counterparts. Reasons for this are varied but include the fact that women are less likely to be given chances of promotion or placed in high ranking positions within companies.

The IT sector has been a major contributor to India's development as a modern, technologically advanced nation. India's IT policy emphasizes its centrality in the country's overall development planning, including digital divide issues and gender inequity issues. MCIT 2003: 3 affirms that "investments in ICT have the greatest multiplier effect on the economy." MCIT projects that by 2008, software exports will increase to 7% of fixed GDP. India was one of the first countries to give women the right to vote, and its Constitution is considered one of the most progressive in the world (Constitution of India 1995). A priority of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women is to grant women the right to participate and make decisions in the social, political, and economic life of the nation (National PolOne feels, however, that attaining professional employment is assumed to satisfy these conditions, and that bridging the digital divide with opportunities for women will inherently resolve gender disparities.er inequities. Technology policy at the national and state levels pays little attention to gender issues. Kerala's current IT policy and Assam's IT policy from 2000 do not mention gender issues. The 2003 annual report by the Minister of Communications and Information devotes only three paragraphs to gender issues, and mentions only that women can find flexible employment in the software sector, and announces a new scholarship program for women studying computer science. This sector has succeeded in addressing gender issues, according to the report (p. 49).

How has gender been impacted in the software sector and other technology sectors in India? People have suggested that the growth of IT with the participation of women leads to a change in gender relations and greater gender equality. How true is this? What is happening to gender roles and relationships as the IT revolution continues? Technology and employment in this sector may not necessarily lead to significant changes in gender roles or power relations. This paper instead suggests that technology can be acquired by and adapted to the existing social structure. We examine current gender relations in India based on a study of a segment of the IT sector after a brief review of literature on women, development, and technology. Engineers drive much of the development of ICT and IT, from software design to hardware to tele*communications. The author provides information on the socio-economic status of women in India; however, it is important to recognize that observations can only be discussed in broad terms since India is a highly heterogeneous nation where no generalization would apply to all the social, economic, and religious groups. According to Singh (2002),

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11 , Iss 8, Dec 2022

there are 91 identifiable cultural regions with distinct languages, territorial identities, and cultural norms.

Before the 1990s, secondary and higher education was not available to women. It took until 1991 before both secondary and higher education was available to girls up to postgraduate level, and again until 1993 for degree courses. The rate of participation in school education for females is more than 95% but girls drop out at a very young age and hence the overall number is lower than the overall rate of participation:

With the advancement of ICT's spread around the globe, many developing countries are now experiencing a rapid economic development. Thus, the number of women in the workforce has increased. However, this is not necessarily an indication of women's equality toward men. There are still many challenges for women to overcome in terms of their participation in technology-related events. The stereotype that technology is a masculine domain persists toward women even though more and more women are entering into this field. According to Narayanan (2000), "women are typically considered as 'others' and added as a welfare measure".

There are laws such as in India like the national policy on EEO or in the US, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, these laws are only paper tigers unless there is broader commitment in organizations towards gender diversity. Organizations with progressive employment practices don't necessarily have to be run by people who are involved with Human Resource Management or Women's Studies.

A progressive EEO program exists in organizations that are committed to achieving a work environment that is free from discrimination based upon sex, race, national origin and other legally protected bases. To retain employees in today's competitive global environment, it is imperative that organizations demonstrate their commitment to support diversity in the workplace. Diversity means accepting people for who they are and what they bring to an organization. Organizations that abide by these laws are considered to be fair. There are several types of EEO programs that organizations implement to ensure they are fair to all their employees.

Affirmative action is an active type of EEO program where the organization tries to create opportunities for minorities and women in employment. Affirmative action programs are designed to promote equal employment opportunities for women, minorities, veterans, etc. These programs are based on the principles of non-discrimination. The policies and practices promoted under this program ensure that no employee is discriminated against because he/she belongs to a certain minority group or sex, religion, etc. There are many types of affirmative action programs. They include hiring quotas, self-identification processes, special recruitment programs or special recruitment pools, seniority system, reverse seniority system, equal opportunity referral systems, preferential hiring processes based on job category, qualifications or experience requirements.

3. EEO practices in Indian organizations:

1. Equal Opportunity Hiring Quotas

Equal opportunity hiring quotas are designed to diversify the workforce by increasing the number of women and minorities in management positions. The goal of this program is to increase the representation of women and minorities in positions where they are underrepresented. There are two types of equal opportunity hiring quotas:

Seniority system: This method is primarily used in government organizations. According to this method, all qualified candidates, regardless of race or gender, are given equal

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11 , Iss 8, Dec 2022

opportunities for promotion based on seniority. However, promotion chances decrease with every promotion attained due to strict seniority requirements for each level. For example, if 2 employees A and B have similar qualifications then A will be promoted before B based on his seniority. But if A has 10 years of seniority while B has 15 years, then A will become the next manager without considering B's qualifications.

Reverse Seniority system: This is where employees are assessed based on their qualifications for promotion. Candidates with the most qualifications are promoted first before lower qualified candidates who have less seniority are considered. This type of promotion system can help promote people from underrepresented groups overqualified candidates. However, it can also cause reverse discrimination if it is used in all organizations and not just in those that suffer from a lack of diversity.

2. Self-Identification Process

This is a method that is used by many organizations in the private sector. This process involves having applicants fill out a form and list their individual preferences. Those who list their particular preferred group (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) will receive preference and some may even be required to fill out some additional paperwork. For example, if an organization is looking for only women who want to work in the office and they need to upgrade their leadership team then they will run this application process.

3. Special recruitment programs

This type of program encourages employees to approach their supervisor and ask for help in obtaining a job outside of regular channels such as job fairs or career fairs. The goal of this program is to increase the number of employees from underrepresented groups and women in management positions.

4. Special recruitment pools

This type of program encourages supervisors to identify qualified candidates from underrepresented groups and women for consideration. These candidates are then placed into a pool that can be referred to managers when they need them. Some organizations may require that these candidates be referred first before regular recruits can be considered for a position.

This type of program also encourages recruitment from particular groups but usually requires applicants to apply through the regular channels such as job fairs or career fairs. Unlike "special referral programs" where applicants must ask for help, this approach tends to encourage employees to take the initiative and apply on their own. There are some differences between these two programs. One of the differences is that the "special recruitment pools" program does not require applicants to provide extra information about their qualifications; rather, this type of program only requires employees to submit an application if they are interested in applying.

5. Seniority system

This method is primarily used by government organizations that promote people on the basis of their seniority. According to this method, all qualified candidates, regardless of race or gender, are given equal opportunities for promotion based on seniority. For example, if 2 employees A and B have similar qualifications then A will be promoted before B based on his seniority. In other words, candidates with higher seniority are promoted ahead of candidates with lower seniority. But if A has 10 years of seniority while B has 15 years, then A will become the next manager without considering B's qualifications.

6. Equal opportunity referral systems

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11 , Iss 8, Dec 2022

This method requires hiring managers to take a closer look at applicants from underrepresented groups and women when they are hiring for a position. In other words, the EO officer may be required to take into account the job-related criteria that can be related to gender or race when making a recommendation to the hiring manager. In addition, some organizations also require that managers interview at least one or two qualified minority or female candidates to comply with equal employment regulations.

7. Preferential hiring processes based on job category, qualifications, or experience requirements

This method may be used in organizations where the hiring manager is required to sign a statement with respect to their hiring practices before they can hire a new employee. These statements are usually drafted by the EO office and require managers to state that they have complied with equal employment policies when making a decision whether or not to promote a qualified applicant into a position. This method does not require managers to interview anyone from underrepresented groups or women; instead, it requires them to report compliance statements on an annual basis.

4. CONCLUSION

What are the reasons that women's overall participation in the paid labour force is decreasing relative to men's participation in the paid labour force despite increased access to education? Why are women's roles subordinated in well-educated job markets in the IT sector? According to the findings of this study, women's participation in engineering and IT is influenced by traditional gender roles, which are defined by the public versus private sphere model. These women are still associated with traits including being secondary, invisible, reproductive (i.e., children), and unpaid, even after attaining some of the highest levels of education in Indian society (Anderson 1988; Patterson and Runyan 1999). While women attempt to navigate the paid labour force, these distinguishing characteristics prevent them from competing effectively and on an equal basis with men, as men are viewed as primary, visible, productive (i.e., goods and services), and as leaders. The persistence of traditional gender roles has negative ramifications for India's development as well as women's participation in the engineering field.

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