

Status of Gender Equality: A Survey among Select Corporate Bodies in Kolkata

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Abstract: This paper is based on an original study carried out to assess the status of gender equality in some select corporate houses in Kolkata. Specific issues targeted in this study are the gender composition of the workforce at the managerial and grass root level, basis of promotion, personal amenities provided to employees, gender based reservation, the employees' role perceptions and domestic responsibilities. The responses obtained from the employers and the employees throw adequate light to analyze the causes of gender inequality at the workplace.

Key-words: Equality, promotion, reservation, gender-bias, role perception.

1. Introduction

The status of women in our society is, in general, one of subservience to men. It gets reflected in different ways, some of which often go unnoticed or uncalled for. Men fare better than women in respect of most socio-economic indicators which are often caused by deliberate action of various agents enjoying authority in our society. It is well recognized that gender discrimination exists 'in every region, at all economic developmental levels, in all political systems, and in diverse religious, social and cultural environments' (*Anker, 1998*).

This paper examines the state of male domination in some of the corporate houses in Kolkata. The findings are based on an empirical survey conducted in 50 corporate houses. The specific issues targeted during the survey are the personal perceptions, corporate policies relating to promotion, pay fixation, gender-based reservation, provision for fulfilment of personal life obligations and the gender-divide at the workplace. It seeks to provide a background for analysing the causes of gender inequality at workplace.

2. Survey of Literature

The afflicted world in which we live is characterized by deeply unequal sharing of the burden of the adversities between women and men. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems. The identified inequalities are expressed through differences in mortality rate, basic facilities and special opportunities in all spheres of life – in professional work, in nature of ownership of assets and in the household chores. The socio-cultural structure starts the process of gender discrimination even before the birth of a child (female foeticide) and the process is carried on in every stage of life - be it basic education, working at home, child rearing strategies, seeking higher education, seeking economic independence or applying for jobs.

To avoid this bias, care must be taken to ensure equal opportunity to both genders in every sphere of life. Equal opportunity calls for improving the chances for effective choice and action by optimizing the match between individual capacity and social opportunity; and elimination of the obstacles and construction of opportunity that encourages more frequent expression of self determination. Some class of individuals lack the capacity or opportunity of self determination and all institutions in the society should optimize the prospects among these least advantaged members by increasing their capacity and improving their opportunity to self determine (*Mithang, 1996*).

'Humans' as 'social animals' are expected to behave consistently in accordance with their societal gender roles. Each gender has some definite rights and duties, restrictions and obligations towards the society and they have to maintain it by behaving in a proper manner. The societal code of conduct varies from one time to another and from one place to another but is usually followed by the contemporary people of both genders.

The breaking up of the 'breadwinner-homemaker' model and the joint family system has encouraged the women to come out of their homes and seek work opportunities in the formal employment sector. The position of educated women seems to swing much between the two roles as they are neither entirely confined to their homes nor given full freedom to fulfil their aspirations. Working in the same routine like a man does not absolve them from their socially imposed domestic responsibility and they are forced to combine work with family obligations (*Perun and Biebly, 1981*). These double roles produce tension and conflict on account of the desire to carry out the dual responsibilities efficiently (*Kapur, 1974*).

These dual responsibilities are further exemplified when *Neerja and Sharma (1988)* state that the mother is the most important variable in child development and she offers a range of socio-emotional and cognitive experience to her child. Due to household and reproductive obligations, many women have interruptions in their employment or have to accept a part time

job (Moen, 1985). The confinement for child rearing is a major obstruction to woman's participation in labour force (Moore and Hofferth, 1985). As a result, women prefer to be employed in occupations that are low paid, require fewer skills and have little scope for improvement (Banerjee, 1991).

In the environment of adversities and social obligations that are faced by women, women's empowerment and independence can be measured by the following seven indicators as suggested by Sharma (2004). These indicators are: Mobility; Economic security; Ability to make purchase of higher values; Involvement in major household decisions; Relative freedom from domination within the family; Political and legal awareness and Involvement in political campaigning and protest.

Male behaviour patterns are more valued than feminine characteristics at workplace creating a potential barrier to the females. Workplace behaviours rated high in the masculine values favour the male paradigm, requiring such qualities as risk taking, aggressiveness and task orientation (Fagenson, 1990). This view is supported by Case (1994) who states that women socialize into roles that involve nurturing and sharing, and men socialize into roles that involve competition and individualism.

The concept of leadership remains a masculine notion defined by subtle and deeply rooted cultural norms and values in the organization. The result is that the women are rated as having the required skill but are not seen culturally as leaders in comparison to men (Merill Sands and Kolb, 2001). There is usually a gender difference in management styles, with men's style identified as more initiating and women's as more considerate and co-operative (Davidson and Cooper, 1992).

Explanations for lesser number of women in leadership positions include the prescriptive nature of stereotypes, many women's lack of ambition or fear of assault on their 'authenticity' (Saunders, 1996). Stroll (2006) further adds that women prefer to support rather than be in line management because of the nature of the work, lack mentors and networks at workplace and finds it difficult to adjust and operate within certain organizational cultures.

The concept of 'entrepreneurship' also advocates masculine characters as observed by Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio (2005). According to them, women frequently lack specific technical skills that tend to dissociate them from starting business in the manufacturing and high tech sectors, and also reduce their likelihood of survival in these sectors. Women encounter greater difficulties in obtaining financial resources and these indulge them to choose low capital intensive activities like those in service sector.

There are many grounds on which an employee is discriminated from others. Among those usually employed at workplace, the more significant grounds are pay package, promotion, performance appraisal, opportunity for training, overseas assignment, fringe benefits and perquisites, punishment and dismissal, special provision, provision for transportation, work environment, and above all, the interpersonal relationship with superiors and co-workers.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of the study, the employment sector is divided into two halves namely Public Sector and Private Sector. A total of 50 corporate houses were selected which included 16 companies from the public sector and 34 from the private sector. For the convenience of the study and for inclusion of different types of employers (employment), the sectors were further classified into Information Technology, Consumer Products, Manufacturing House (Factory), Bank, Telecommunication, Education, Finance, Healthcare Services, Hotel and Other Allied Services. Five institutions from each sector were selected on the basis of their size (market capitalization) and availability (location of office in or around Kolkata with HR Department and willingness to give information or time) and were interviewed with the help of questionnaire. Each subdivision had companies from the private sector as well as those from the public sector.

The study contains 50 responses from the HR Managers / Personnel Officers relating to corporate policies and 500 responses from employees (250 males and 250 females) randomly selected from these companies using non-probabilistic (judgemental) sampling technique. The survey was conducted from January 2009 to May 2010. For analysis, these data have been grouped together for brevity, analysis and presentation.

4. Responses from HR Managers

From the responses obtained from the employers (HR Managers) [Ref. Annexure Tables] the following information emerge:

- a. Board of directors: Out of 36 institutions providing information regarding their governing bodies, it is observed that 9 institutions did not have any female member in their governing body. It is further noted that in the remaining 27, there is not even 50% representation of females in the decision making bodies. Moreover some of the women have made it to the management by virtue of their birth or marital status.
- b. Managerial position: Out of 50 institutions surveyed, only one private school have more females at managerial position with 5 institutions having no female manager and another 6

having less than 10% female managers. It is seen that in only 13 institutions females account for more than 50% of male representatives as managers.

c. Employees: In every institution surveyed, males out-number females except in 2 private schools and in 1 private sector hospital. The worst male-female ratio is found in the factories. In contrast, the IT sector, schools and hospitals present a picture more favourable to females.

d. Promotion: Periodic performance appraisal and seniority are considered to be important ingredients for promotion. The HR managers along with the performance report from the present job are also considered vital in promoting an employee.

e. Reservation: Special gender based reservations are absent barring in 4 institutions (3 hospitals and 1 FMCG company) but on enquiry it is found that if given a choice 34 (out of 50) HR managers would like to select a candidate according to the nature of the job.

f. Personal amenities: It is interesting to note that provision for baby-care facility (crèche) at the workplace is available in only one out of the 50 institutions surveyed. Excepting in 6 institutions, provisions for flexible working hours and change of shift are usually not given to employees which makes it difficult for females. To compound this problem, only 11 institutions had provisions for pick up or drop facilities in case of overtime or late night shift.

5. Responses from employees

a. House-hold responsibilities: Household chores like cooking and washing clothes are primarily considered to be a female affair and such jobs are carried on by females in 92% of the families surveyed. 61% of the respondents further believed that it is the responsibility of the mother to look after the young child till he/she is 5 years of age.

b. Cause of resignation: 64% of the males resigned to look for a better job opportunity for a better career and 15% were seeking for a job with more security. In contrast, domestic responsibility was said to be the primary cause of resignation of females (49%) followed by workplace harassment (12%).

c. Personal perception: 58% of the females agree that their self esteem increases if their spouses are in a better position than them at workplace but 81% of the males feel otherwise in this matter. 51% of the females disagree on the issue of accompaniment by their spouses in case of transfer whereas 42% are undecided on this issue.

d. When the respondents were asked to associate gender with jobs, nursing and primary teaching was said to be a female job by 84% and 71% respectively whereas bus driver, pilot and CEO were deemed to be a male job by 97%, 90% and 60% respondents respectively.

6. Summary and Conclusion

It is observed that the formal employment sector is primarily male dominated, controlled and managed. Decision making role is denied to women in all organizations surveyed. In some institutions where women are present in the governing body or in managerial positions, they are in minority.

Promotion or appointment decisions are usually taken by HR managers or personnel department which again shows male control. Although gender based reservations are absent (barring in 4 institutions), from the employee responses it is observed that jobs are gendered by our socio-cultural norms and HR managers, on most occasions if given a choice, would like to select a candidate on the nature of the job.

It has to be accepted that working women from nuclear families have to accept their dual responsibility and fulfil their family obligations which restrict them in their personal lives on the one hand and on the other, lack of crèches, flexible working hours, provision for day shift in emergencies, personal bias in promotion, transfer, etc. hamper their working life to a great extent.

The result is a paradox: Women are provided with all opportunities including legal provisions theoretically but in practical situation as observed, women are out-numbered and have to survive a tough situation in the corporate hierarchy.

7. Limitations of the study

- Due to time and resource constraints, the study has considered 50 corporate houses and 500 employees as sample which is few in number compared to the total population.
- The presumption that every HR manager and employee has perfect knowledge about all the questions asked during the survey is not always true.
- The study is conducted in well organized formal employment sector. The large unorganized informal sector might present a different picture.

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Annexure

Table showing Male-Female bifurcation of the number of Directors, Managers and Employees and those who have retired or resigned in the last 2 years (Public sector- *, Private sector- #)

ALLIED SERVICE PROVIDER

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	25	3	280	85	30	15	15	9	NA	NA
B*	5	0	3035	38	201	1	NA	NA	NA	NA
C#	3	2	105	25	8	2	NA	NA	10	2
D#	6	0	360	90	60	40	NA	NA	NA	NA
E#	19	1	1887	148	109	2	41	2	198	27

BANK

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	NA	NA	107	13	15	2	15	3	NA	NA
B*	NA	NA	83	27	18	10	NA	NA	NA	NA
C#	6	0	120	35	20	8	10	7	NA	NA
D#	NA	NA	62	13	41	2	NA	NA	NA	NA
E#	NA	NA	70	30	3	0	41	2	NA	NA

COMMUNICATION

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	NA	NA	180	76	12	4	NA	NA	NA	NA
B#	NA	NA	85	38	10	9	NA	NA	30	25
C#	NA	NA	80	30	1	1	NA	NA	NA	NA
D#	NA	NA	175	58	12	10	NA	NA	20	22
E#	NA	NA	146	65	10	3	NA	NA	NA	NA

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CONSUMER PRODUCT

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A#	13	1	412	19	46	6	5	0	15	2
B#	5	2	86	23	5	1	4	1	NA	NA
C#	12	0	610	205	350	15	25	10	55	5
D#	3	1	107	25	12	3	NA	NA	20	5
E#	NA	NA	80	35	25	10	5	3	5	8

EDUCATION

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	12	0	21	3	2	0	2	0	NA	NA
B*	9	4	18	16	2	1	2	1	NA	NA
C*	13	0	25	6	2	0	2	0	1	0
D#	6	3	60	182	2	14	3	6	4	7
E#	9	0	59	64	6	0	2	1	1	6

FINANCE

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	10	0	42	18	15	5	8	5	NA	NA
B#	4	2	115	33	20	15	NA	NA	NA	NA
C#	NA	NA	130	59	30	12	NA	NA	3	1
D#	6	3	120	80	45	30	NA	NA	20	15
E#	4	1	250	10	24	2	NA	NA	NA	NA

HOSPITAL

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	NA	NA	250	150	70	20	80	39	3	0
B*	9	6	187	54	9	5	6	2	0	0
C#	2	1	150	230	45	20	2	5	40	52
D#	3	1	150	55	23	12	NA	NA	12	8
E#	4	2	180	79	18	12	18	10	15	18

HOTEL

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A#	8	3	200	58	25	15	NA	NA	20	10
B#	1	1	80	12	4	2	NA	NA	5	8
C#	3	2	80	21	8	3	NA	NA	0	0
D#	3	1	130	65	15	8	NA	NA	10	12
E#	2	1	55	12	5	2	NA	NA	4	1

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	7	4	285	150	56	36	38	15	20	10
B#	14	0	3000	1500	88	30	NA	NA	50	20
C#	8	1	120	35	9	4	6	8	3	5
D#	NA	NA	7000	1750	200	155	NA	NA	55	33
E#	5	3	2000	1500	200	180	NA	NA	80	25

MANUFACTURING

	Director		Employee		Manager		Retired		Resigned	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A*	23	2	10260	427	20	1	440	106	NA	NA
B*	12	1	290	32	14	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
C*	10	5	250	85	30	10	80	25	NA	NA
D#	NA	NA	912	29	381	13	NA	NA	0	0
E#	5	2	205	90	50	25	38	20	5	3