

Empowering Women through Equal Job Opportunities

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Abstract: *The article talks about discrimination against women and what steps are being taken by companies and governments in the current context to empower women.*

Keywords: women empowerment

In almost every country around the world women face numerous barriers and gender-based discrimination in their work place. The discrimination sets in while they are getting education till the age when they get into the job market and this doesn't end there but carries on and continues at the work place. Such obstacles act as hindrance towards women getting an equal status with men in the world of work. Legal barriers such as rigid labour laws, barriers to women entrepreneurship, inheritance laws and distribution of assets in the event of divorce are just a few examples which further compound gender inequalities.

Empowerment of women in the workforce is nothing but allowing women to have more control over their lives. It implies making women learn new skills so as to make them independent and giving them enough freedom to make their own schedules. Empowerment is created when the strengths of women are uplifted and they get recognition for the contributions they make to the growth of companies to which they associate. India has taken various measures to empower women wherein the ministry of women and child development has evolved schemes and programmes for the benefit of women which cover women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food nutrition etc through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing. Schemes of the ministry such as Swashakti, Swayamsidha, STEP and Swawlamban enable economic empowerment. Working Women Hostels and Creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes provide protection and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The Ministry also supports autonomous bodies like National Commission, Central Social Welfare Board and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh which work for the welfare and development of women. Another area of special focus of the Ministry is economic sustenance of women through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing.

As per statistics only 4.8% of CEO's of top fortune 500 companies are held by women. To name a few like that of COO's Sheryl Sandberg (COO, Facebook); Ginni Rometty (Chairman, President, and CEO, IBM); Ruth Porat (SVP and CFO, Google, Alphabet) and Indra Nooyi (Chairman and CEO, PepsiCo)

This poor statistical figure indicates how senior leadership positions are dominated by men and displays discrimination against women. The need of the hour is to step up the respect for women by involving men. It is extremely important that we all unite to deconstruct negative social

norms and aim to rebalance the power structures that ignite violence and inequality in the society. This is also the crux of UN Women's HeforShe movement, and since 2015 HeForShe Corporate IMPACT Champions have taken creative and effective approaches to tackling the greatest barriers for women in the workplace. For example, in 2016 PwC dramatically increased the number of women on their Global Leadership Team, from 18% in 2015 to 50% in 2017, while Accor Hotels are driving towards gender parity in management and equal pay.

Danone company has also contributed to the upliftment of women by implementing 1000 day paternal leave policy providing 18 weeks of gender neutral paternal leave in more than 130 countries. The #MeToo movement in India is also a platform which gives women an opportunity to voice against injustice and encourages women to speak up thus slowly breaking the culture of silence.

The campaign started picking up around 7 October when actor Tanushree Dutta made serious allegations against Nana Patekar recounting her experiences during the shoot of the film, Horn OK Pleassss, 10 years ago. Since then many similar controversies involving many famous and important personalities, including Union minister MJ Akbar have unfolded. However, to sustain the momentum that the #MeToo movement has gained in the past few weeks, India needs to act upon the grounds gained and create a systemic long-term solution to effectively curb the menace of harassment at the workplace.

The above instances are game-changing that have the potential to create tangible and immediate change in the workplace for women and their families. The research provided by the United Nations shows that businesses promoting gender equality and women empowerment are more profitable.

As an engine for jobs, innovation and investment, business has a critical role to play in advancing gender equality and empowering women to reach their full potential. There should be active mentoring and sponsorship programmes along with promotion of women's entrepreneurship. Flexibility should be ensured in remote working, provisions like parental leave, pension schemes, health and child care should be given.

To conclude, while we agree that businesses have a great role to play. It is the society's responsibility to empower

women and each individual in its own capacity should contribute towards this objective.

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