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## Role of Women in Information Technology Sector

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**ABSTRACT:** The emergence of Information Technology sector in mid-1990s has unveiled a potential employment opportunity for women in this organized sector congenially befitting their job environment and offering, in principle, least gender discrimination. This paper attempts to analyze the issues of opportunities and constraints the women employees face in the Information Technology sector in India. IT sector, through its employment, contributes substantially to women empowerment. Its employment potentiality provides inspiration to female students to take up technical and professional courses with an eye to the job market. Most reviews reveal that, notwithstanding overall satisfactory gender neutral pursuit by this sector, an optimal level of gender inclusivity is still to be achieved, especially to the senior level. Moreover, this sector requires to be extra-careful in doing away with the prevailing maladies such as 'Feminization', 'Glass ceiling' etc. The theoretical aspect of individualization in the workplace is palpable but at the societal level, patriarchal strategies dominate on the Indian psyche. The reflection of this paper is arrived at, on the basis of, the inputs drawn from different literatures of secondary sources.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminization, Gender discrimination, 'Glass ceiling', Information Technology and women employees face.

### I. INTRODUCTION (AN OVERVIEW)

Globalization has made deep inroads in the Indian scene in post-1990s. It sets off, inter- alia, market liberalization and emergence of Information Technology (IT) sector. Development of Information Technology (ICT)<sup>1</sup>, in recent decades, facilitated by the high-speed data communication links, contributed to improved communicative networks bridging the temporal and spatial boundaries and, correspondingly, widened the scope of opportunities for people seeking paid work. The onset of Liberalization and Globalization in 1990s paved the way for growth of IT industry in India. IT industry enjoys natural comparative advantage of 12 hour time-gap with most of the overseas countries, exposure to a large cross- section of educated English-speaking but cheap labor force and, above all, Indian Government policy incentives e.g. setting up of several Software Technology Parks (STPs) and providing tax holidays to profit making IT industry etc. Besides boosting up export earnings for the country and creating a new pool of entrepreneurs, IT sector has its inherent spillover benefit of creating employment potential for a large pool of educated unemployed youths including an attractive option for the women. It is worth mentioning that IT industry has now captured about 51 per cent of the world market (Kumar 2001). National Association of Software Services Company (NASSCOM)–Mencher-Report 2009, on the other hand, has revealed that over the years the proportion of women workforce at entry level as well as middle level management has increased considerably but there is lack of adequate representation of women at the senior level. This paper attempts to get into the theoretical underpinning having emerged from the overview of literatures on women working in this high-tech industry in India. To start with, a probe into the secondary literatures is taken into consideration for the questions raised in the objectives of the paper. The paper summarizes the threads of arguments that follow in the discussion section of the paper. Finally, it wraps up conclusion after providing some vital leads for comprehensive future research.



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## **Prominence of Individualization in the era of Globalization:**

Friedman, 2006, coined Globalization 3.0 for the period 2000 and onwards enabling individuals all over the world to become empowered as they began to realize that they had more power than ever to go global as individuals, had more opportunities for work and to think of themselves as individuals. This phase of Globalization is distinctively different from Globalization 1.0 (1492-1800) when countries get globalised with other countries for the sake of trade. Globalization 2.0 (1800-2000), on the other hand, encompasses the period from Industrial Revolution-to Colonization-to Multi-National Companies (MNCs) going Global. As we go through the literatures, we find that the Globalizing forces have mediated changes at the Macro level or Societal layers; at Meso level i.e. the economic and political strata and at Micro level that includes change in identity at individual level.

**Macro level:** According to Anthony Giddens (1991, 1994, 2000) Globalizing forces have influenced the transformation of Society from traditional to modern to high modern Society. The traditional Society or pre-industrial Society predominantly based on communal structures, had the feeling. With the rise of modern structures and the associations based on shared interests in Modern Society, the feeling was replaced by a set of abstract, atomized individuals, thus, replacing the earlier Society. Scott, 1994, observes that the High modern society/risk- society<sup>6</sup> again replaced the Modern Society with innovation of electronic communications systems and the Risk Society has set individuals free from modern abstract structures.

**Society and individual identity:** The very individual identity changes even with the change in the type of Society. In the Traditional Society, it is the collectivities like Group, Community etc. prescribe the individuals not only what is done in the Society but „what should be done in a Society; hence, it is the collectivities that ascribe an identity to the individual and provide a framework of action structure for the present and organizes the future. Therefore, it acts as the glue that holds the pre-modern social orders (Giddens 1994). The self identity in modern Society becomes more freed from traditional identities in terms of Kinship, Clan, Caste, family identities etc. with stress on atomization and individuation. Here, Self is expressed in terms of what they do and why they do it giving reutilization a sense of trust or ontological security sustained in the daily activities (Giddens 1991). The third phase of the Society i.e. the High Modern Society/Risk Society is marked by Reflexive Modernization which means self confrontation with the effects of risks. It dissolves the traditional parameters of Class Culture and Consciousness, Gender and family roles. Reflexive Modernization is a theory of ever-increasing powers of Social Actors (free and knowledgeable agency) in regard to structure. The theory of Reflexive- Modernization is a very strong programme of individualisation<sup>10</sup>. Becks I am I observation in which the I am increasingly made free from communal ties and am able to construct his or her own biographical narratives (Scott 1994). Individual identity in post-traditional Society is dependent on who are you and what do you want? (Giddens 1994).

**Meso Level:** The post- Liberalization era saw radical changes in Economy causing a corresponding change in Statism. The post liberalized Economy, better known as the New Economy, is the Economy of Internet Industry i.e. of dot.com firms. Here, Internet provided the medium of networking organization, information- processing and knowledge generation. It has transformed the old Economy to its global reach with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale (Castells 2001). This form of Economic Globalization leads to a major transformation in territorial organization of economic activity with geographic dispersal of firms and factories and virtualization of economic activities is evident from the growing number of economic activities taking place in electronic space (Sassen 2006). Castells (1997) termed the new system of business organization as the Networ Enterprise and is the situation where networking logic based on working on-line with the networked units in real time. It advocates organizational flexibility of firms in contravention of rule-based mechanized Fordist structure. It encourages the deregulated, flexible post-Fordism way of production, management and marketing. Companies offer autonomy to workers by placing Toyatism<sup>11</sup> over Toyalism<sup>12</sup> and demand more commitment for their business projects.

## **Micro level**

In the Network Enterprise, work-force is an important resource for productivity, innovation and competitiveness. The individual is dependent on labor market and it is the labor market that shapes the individual identity. Castells (1997) points out as to how self-programmable labor, who works on Net, develop a distinct kind of identity of self. Identity of people is increasingly organized not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are. The workforces need to match their portfolio careers. They are entrusted total commitment for the business projects i.e. they



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need to keep it up with their project-based work-lives that may necessitate expanded working hours. Henceforth, their identity is structured around binary logic based on in/out, switch on/off as individuals, groups, regions and countries and structured for fulfilling project goals of network. Therefore, the workforces do not develop any strong sense of local or national or organizational identity in relation to a particular firm. Consequently, a new system of social relationship emerges centered round the individual i.e. mecentered (tertiary relationships). It is a specific pattern of sociability i.e. individualized relationship to the society rooted in the individualization of relationship within the workplace between the workers and the work process replacing primary relationships (embodied in families and communities) and secondary relationships (embodied in associations). The author points out that this leads to crisis in patriarchalism and traditional nuclear family. Castells (2001) further observes that the emergence of new pattern of sociability is centered on networked individualism where individuals build their networks, on-line and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities and projects.

## II. CHALLENGES

The Women employees have to face challenges of long work hours, constant travelling and juggling different time zones of international clients, Social issues on account of working during night. As a result the industry is losing women employees at the middle and senior management level. In Infosys top management has less than 2% women employees. In a study conducted to assess the status of women in technical education and employment in Karnataka state by Sequeira A.H. (2005) self employment among degree and diploma holders was as low as 1% of the total number of pass outs. Access to technology and internet connectivity in the remote villages is a great challenge in India. To capitalize on the opportunities for women empowerment provided by Information Technology it is important to increase internet connectivity in remote villages. The other challenges are:

1. Poor regulation, and support for women working in informal sector.
2. Poor awareness of ICT for women.
3. Lack of e-commerce related infrastructure in developing countries.
4. Language barriers for the use of ICT for non English speakers.
5. Paternal set up of Indian society.
6. Poor Internet Usage: Women form a very small part of the internet population in the country, with working and non - working women accounting for only 8 per cent and 7 per cent of the internet users" universe.
7. Conservative outlook for working women.
8. Challenges of managing career and family.

## III. OPPORTUNITIES

Nasscom estimates that the male: female ratio in IT industry has improved from 70:24 in 2005 to 70:30 now. IT reduces the impact of barriers of time and distance in organizing and managing the service delivery of businesses. A large part of jobs outsourced are going to women. The freedom to work from anywhere and anytime can become a catalyst for financial independence and empowerment of women by enhancing their extra income. A women entrepreneurship cell should be set up to handle the various problems of women entrepreneurs in all states at the college level.

## IV. PROMOTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN IT

Sarada Ramani started Computer International with six employees. Now the firm has transformed into an outsourced product development company with 150 employees. Sangeeta Patni at Extensio Software builds technology in India and sells it to the rest of the world. The ten employee company has now MNC"s like SAP, IBM, and ACC as its major clients.

Rakhee Nagpal started Dynamic Vertical Solutions (DVS), an ERP solution provider for retail and hospitality industry in 2006. Its list of major clients includes D"damas, Lilliput,



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Devyani Group among others. Anu Lall, CEO of SNARTAK IT Solutions started the business with a mere Rs.12000. Now the firm has reputed corporate like Siemens, Satyam, Ranbaxy, Apollo Tyres and others as their client. These women entrepreneurs will become the role models and inspire many more to become entrepreneurs.

Apart from entrepreneurship other opportunities are:

- Flexibility for women to work from home.
- Women friendly working environment in IT companies.
- Enhanced access of women to distance learning.
- Access to information through e-governance initiatives of government.
- Better market access for micro enterprises through e-commerce.
- Regulatory support by government to support microfinance and mobile banking for women empowerment.

## V. CONCLUSION

There is growing recognition of role played by ICT industry in women empowerment. Industry norms are undergoing metamorphosis to attract and retain talented women employees. The need to balance work family balance is creating a talent crunch in the middle and top management. These talented women can utilize their experience and talent to become entrepreneurs. Women at the top of ICT industry are setting a role model for the young generation. Women have to maintain a balance between professional and personal life to capitalize on the opportunities provided by Information and Communication Technology. Family members should support the women to utilize their talent and skills to establish their unique identity and for the economic welfare of the family.

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