

Engendering Organizations: Demystifying Gender Neutral Spaces

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Abstract—Organizations are a byproduct of structured relationships sprouting from continuous interactions between human and financial capital towards achievement of common goal and stability. Organizations are social structures comprising of power hierarchies, division of labour and several niche divisions and branches. The present paper focuses upon the gendered construct of an organization which has a dominant influence on the key organizational decisions vis. vis. promotions, transfers, rewards and other crucial growth opportunities. Organizations are often viewed as gender neutral spaces completely ignoring the nuances of gender segregation at workplace. Paper focuses upon glass ceiling effect and how a woman's gender identity is equated to her being less efficient and effective in productive roles when compared to men by virtue of their rigid gender roles. Undoubtedly, the dawn of globalization has comprehended the productive roles of women in economic activities. However, it cannot be assumed that a woman is relieved of her reproductive and community roles. Triple role burden on women has not only curtailed their growth and development opportunities but has also taken a toll on their physical, emotional and social well being with increased anxiety and stress levels.

This paper is a conscious attempt to throw light on gender neutral nature of organizations by highlighting how gendered aspects translates into gender discrimination at workplace with respect to gender division of labour, gender wage gaps, glass ceiling effects and situations of workplace harassment. The paper is premised on the fact that the organizations must not be considered as gender neutral spaces rather embody gender sensitivity. It also seeks to suggest various ways to integrate gender sensitivity within the organic genesis of any organization.

Keywords: *Gender Roles, Triple Role Burden, Gender Discrimination, Glass ceiling, Gender Sensitivity.*

Introduction

Structural Adjustment Programme more commonly understood as course of liberalization, privatization and globalization tremendously infused competitive spirit within organizations. Global dynamics led to the overhauling of organizational structures subjected to free-play of market forces of demand and supply. Waves of globalization immensely contributed in the technological advancement, attracted foreign direct investments, created platforms for

innovative solutions and abridged international trade boundaries which may be considered as key achievements for developing economies. But, integration of global economies came with few loopholes as well. Liberal ideologies led to the development of competitive pressures in private organizations whereas public sector undertakings faced budget crunch which together led to increased labour turnover, rigid hierarchies, weakening of trade unions, increased job insecurities and amplified wage gaps. Undoubtedly, one can witness surge of inequalities within business environment.

Organizations are spaces for power hierarchies, leadership development and subsequent empowerment. Gender based inequality is pervasive not only within societal structures but is also prevalent within organizational and institutional structures. Gendered construct of an organization remains unquestioned therefore making gender inequality invisible. However it is critical to realize that gender based inequalities are deep rooted within organizational hierarchies, goals and objectives often noticeable via organizations recruitment preferences, promotions, transfers and general human resource policies. Power mechanisms of control and authority have a direct bearing on a woman's career choices, growth and development. Not only this, it also influences her productive efficiency and effectiveness.

Several mutually linked factors and strategies take part in promoting gender-based inequalities within organizations by completely ignoring the gender fervor of an organization by turning gender blind and thus considering business organizations, decisions and management to be neutral spaces.

Subsequent sections of the paper shall throw light on various concepts showcasing gender inequalities within organizations thereby highlighting the importance of amalgamating gender sensitivity in the organizational genesis.

Gender Segregation at Workplace

Organizations are considered to be separate legal identities involving series of processes, power and authority structures and social relationships which have underlying gendered processes. Organizations are reflective spaces for gender-

based societal norms, cultural practices and identity associations which are discovered, preserved and created through its course of action. Studies suggest that it is impractical to realize gender based nuances within an organization unless one understands the gendered construct of an organization [1] [2] [3]

It is crucial to understand that gender norms, roles, attitudes and identities are socially constructed. Societies and communities defined set of rigid roles and duties, premises of which had no biological or scientific rationale. Patterns of gender socialization created stark differences expecting women to portray reproductive and community roles as nurturer with empathy, humbles, kindness and warmth. Contrary, to these traits men were preferred to display dominating and authoritarian personalities assuming control and command in important decision making. Childbearing may be a biologically defined role for a woman but it cannot be assumed for child rearing. It is difficult to estimate the time and energy a full time working woman spends on gratifying her reproductive roles. Accordingly, biology cannot explain gender segregation which is nothing but an outward appearance of social segregation [4].

Gender segregation can happen at various levels. Gender segregation of work as paid and unpaid, segregation concerning status and income inequality between men and women are some of the key aspects which necessitate engendering organizations with gender sensitivity. Let us now understand how gender segregation influences men and women.

Gender Division of Labour

Work may be defined as array of activities or expenditure of energy to generate services and create products of value to its consumers [5]. The underlying principle and conventional connotations communicate work or job to be an economic term which is asexual and has universal applicability. Studies [1][3][6][7] argue that existing organizational discourses are gender neutral which comprehend nature of work, abstract jobs and power hierarchies from a masculine dominant standpoint assuming a man to be a worker. Universal image of a worker clearly identifies itself to be male. His attitude, traits, roles, sexuality and concentration of productive roles as bread winner over nurturers suitably permeates organizational design, philosophy and operational systems thereby discriminating women. Studies [1][3][6][7][8] exclaimed that largely women face issues in the organization not by virtue of their sexuality or characteristics but due to organizational structure. Women are often swarmed in monotonous, dead-end and odd jobs at the shop floor level whereas men are reserved for jobs requiring sophisticated decision making and analytics. *“Gender enters the picture through organizational roles that carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them”* [6].

Gender stereotypes commonly exist within occupations thereby affecting women’s career choices and patterns. A report [9] highlighted that gender based differences in career choices and career patterns are multifaceted and complicated. Sectoral and occupational segregation are primary issues which involve both horizontal and vertical segregation i.e. women are not encouraged further up the ladder and vertically they are designated into gender stereotypical roles and functions. The report focuses upon three primary findings that 1) *‘both sector specific and occupational segregation continue to be major obstacles to the equal treatment of women and men in employment’*; 2) *‘those occupations which are female-dominated are also often the lowest paid jobs’*; 3) *‘men and women are roughly equally represented in the high-skilled, non-manual and elementary occupational groups. However, almost 40% of all female employment is in the low-skilled, non-manual occupations, whereas this accounts for only around 14% of male employment’*

Senior positions often demand managerial and key decision making capabilities portraying images of masculine ethic [6]. It is presumed that traits belonging to masculine ethic can only be exhibited by males as they have high problem solving and analytical abilities. They have assumed to have high level cognitive functioning with more goals clarity which works in favour of an organization. Males are often considered low in emotional quotient which renders them ideal to keep their personal and professional life separate from each other. Researches [2][3][10][11] emphasized that males find themselves performing better and efficiently in professions related to military, science and technology. Gender inequality in career choices and patterns can be attributed to the early gender socialization patterns wherein boys are encouraged to take up mathematics and science as their academic disciplines whereas girls are conveniently suggested to take up humanities or social sciences. Gender and career choices processes are a life-cycle approach as it has direct bearing on their occupational outcomes [2]. Organizations contribute in maintaining gender inequalities by controlling machines and technologies attributed to a man’s skilled work and delegating unskilled low paid work to women.

Similarly, job roles and descriptions often sexualize woman worker especially in secretarial roles whereas in other blue-collared or white collared jobs women may be completely barred to avoid sexual liaisons if any at all. Sex segregation at workplace is pervasive to an extent that it often appears to be a natural order of things. Job segregation on the basis of one’s sexual identity determine pay gaps between sexes for same work at same at same time and at same position. Clearly, occupational segregation leads to gendered patterns of inequality with no rational justification for the same.

Gender Based Wage Gap

“Women constitute half of the world’s population, two-third of the world’s workforce but gets one-tenth of the world’s income and one-percent of the world’s wealth” (United

Nations, 1980). Income inequalities as an outcome of one's gender identity may be regarded as one of the awful forms of gender discrimination. Reflecting upon India's national figures then women workforce participation rate stands at 25.51 per cent (Census) clearly indicating women's contribution in economic activities despite the sad reality that her reproductive and community roles of child bearing and rearing remains out of the purview of income generating activities. At this juncture, it becomes imperative to understand that regardless of her dynamic presence in the workforce, women earns only 57 per cent of what their male colleagues earn for carrying out same work [12]. Astonishingly, gender pay gap magnifies for a woman who is more qualified and as she moves forward in her career [13]. Progression in occupational ladder meant widening gender pay gaps. Findings [12] highlighted that women as interns or trainees earned only 11.35 per cent less than men whereas women at managerial positions earned relatively 38.51 per cent less than men. Similarly, the pay gap for semi skilled jobs was merely 6.80 per cent but for highly skilled jobs women earned 36.77 per cent less than men. These figures clearly pronounce gender discrimination at workplace which does not only curtail a woman's financial independence but seemingly impacts her overall self confidence and determination with lasting impacts on her overall health and well being.

Gender pay gaps can be considered as critical forms of a woman's economic abuse curtailing not only her professional but also her household decision making autonomy. Income inequalities further suppress women by glorifying her socially constructed inferior status thus forcing her to maintain the culture of silence. Undoubtedly, income-inequalities have a direct bearing on individual's access and control over resources. Gender biased attitudes and relations as an outcome of economic dependence of women often gets translated into heinous forms of gender based violence where men wishes to establish supremacy over a woman's body by restricting her sexual and reproductive autonomy [14][15]. Significantly, '*gender-based violence may be understood as a two-edged sword both as a cause of income inequality and as a consequence of income-inequality*' [14].

Understanding the nexus of economic abuse, women bear a brunt at manifold aspects:

- 1) Women struggled to enter occupations which were paid well and therefore remained concentrated at lower positions.
- 2) Organizations being gender neutral spaces failed to foresee its workers relations to the needs of procreation. Universal image of worker which is a man is excluded from the entire cycle of procreation. Therefore rendering organizations with a convenient explanation for their preferential attitudes in recruiting males at senior level management. Women often take maternity leaves to complete their biological duties of child bearing however

the gender blind structures of organization failed to realize that family rearing is a mutual overlapping reproductive role for both men and women.

- 3) Lastly, if women entered skilled highly paid jobs they were prevented to move ahead in occupational ladder. The phenomenon is well known as glass ceiling effect curtailing women's career advancement.

Income inequalities as a byproduct of gender stereotyping and discrimination often gets ignored because it's outward appearances communicate that different people are working at different jobs and at different positions thereby ignoring the gendered aspects of such decisions and processes.

The Glass Ceiling Effect

Advent of globalization led to the mass abuse of laborers as the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers lowered down (due to technological advancement) and unemployment was at its peak. To substantial household income, women took up unskilled low paid odd jobs but the barriers for women working in formal sectors were spread both horizontally and vertically. Glass ceiling which is better understood as the "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" [16] further augmented the gender inequality within organizations.

Gender segregation at workplace provided women with little or no opportunity for their career growth and development by restricting them for promotions. Some of the key issues preventing women with equal opportunities for promotions are:

- Traditional reliance on women being less efficient by virtue of her reproductive obligations;
- Emphasis on a woman's high emotional quotient rendering her unsuitable for tough decision making;
- Rigid socialization patterns preventing women to enter technical fields of science and technology or may be those related to sports and military services requiring physical endurance;
- Conscious attempts and efforts by men to establish dominance within organizations and retain power and control by virtue of their gender privileges

Glass ceiling practices clearly indicates that presence of women in an organization matters and that organizations cannot remain ignorant of their gendered construct.

Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Sexual harassment at workplace can be regarded as one of the key factors preventing women to enter active workforce. Lack of gender sensitivity within organizations often place women at an exploiting end not always physically but also verbally, emotionally and socially. Sexual harassment may take place

within organizations at various levels ranging from sexual assault to mockery. Hostile organizational environment may make women feel unsafe and vulnerable to vulgar and obscene gestures and comments. They may feel compromised or threatened hence forcing women to quit jobs or may be not entering at all. Workplace harassment may be viewed as sharp edged tool barring women to enter male dominating corporate world. Studies suggest that organizations lose millions because of absenteeism, reduced productivity and high turnover for females due to non functional or poor harassment policies.

Conclusion and Suggestive Strategies

An organization is an amalgamation of various processes, systems, structures, resources and most importantly its employees. Infusing organization within gender sensitivity shall be the key mantra if nations aspire to achieve sustainable development goals and targets of gender equality (SDG, 5). Organizations cannot remain gender neutral and gender blind spaces amidst dynamic development forces and shall aspire to build enabling environment eliminating all forms of gender discrimination. Some of the suggestive strategies are as follows:

- 1) Engendering organizations require overhauling of business structures by reducing gender biases in recruitment policies
- 2) Developing societies have a history of uncensored gender and work related concerns which reduced the scope for any dialogues or discussion between employers and their employees about their family matters. Organizations must be sensitive to the reproductive roles of both men and women and shall provide for maternity and paternity benefits. Private corporates such as Microsoft, Google etc have taken up the first mover advantage and made an effort to retain their highly skilled female talent by providing with day care crèche facilities. Other organizations can also follow on similar lines.
- 3) Work-life balance is crucial considering the present situations of enormous stress and anxiety levels in workers. Organizations can do their bit to reduce triple role burden for women by opening door for work from facilities, realistic workloads; flexible timings; child-care facilities; leave plans; work sharing etc.
- 4) Organizations must vouch to integrate gender equality in its organic structure by completely abolishing the vice practices of glass ceiling and horizontal, vertical and internal segregations by encouraging equal opportunities for career advancement for both men and women
- 5) Organizations shall practice zero tolerance policy against all forms of sexual harassment at workplaces which may

be achieved by imparting gender-sensitive trainings to all employees.

- 6) Organizations may involve themselves in implementation of gender sensitive projects to spread the message loud and encourage like-minded organizations.
- 7) Organizations may be conscious in generating and creating gender sensitive literature, reports and media campaigns if any.
- 8) Affirmative action's also known as positive discrimination may be brought in practice to encourage women workforce participation.

The proposed strategies aim to infuse and create gender sensitive pathways for organizations overall identity and system such that commitment for gender equality and equity is embedded within its genesis.

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