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**Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in Corporate Sectors**

**Dr. K. Riyazahamed**

*Assistant Professor,*

*PG and Research Department of Commerce,*

*Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous)*

*(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University)*

*Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.*

**Dr. E. Mubarak Ali**

*Associate Professor and Head,*

*PG and Research Department of Commerce,*

*Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous),*

*(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University),*

*Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.*

**Abstract**

Women's Empowerment has been an issue of immense discussions and contemplation over the last few decades world-wide. This as an outline has been on top of the lists of most government plans & programs as well. Efforts have been made on a regular basis across nations to address this issue and enhance the socio-economic status of women. However, it has been observed that most of the policies and programs view empowerment in the economic sense only working in the belief that economic self-reliance empowers women ignoring other variables like health, education, literacy etc. Women empowerment has become a critical focus for countries worldwide, including India, as it contributes to overall economic growth and social development. The

corporate sector plays a significant role in driving women's empowerment, both in terms of fostering gender equality within their organizations and promoting the participation of women in decision-making positions. However, despite progress, women in corporate sectors in India still face several challenges and obstacles in their professional journey. This study aims to identify and analyze these issues and challenges, intending to propose strategies for promoting women's empowerment in corporate sectors in India

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Socio-economic, Issues, Challenges, Corporate Sectors.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a fundamental component of societal advancement and development. There has recently been an increase in recognition of the imperative to involve women in various industries, including the business world. Being empowered by women within the corporate sector is indispensable for promoting gender equality, encouraging economic expansion, and sustainable progress. India, one of the biggest countries in the world economies, has achieved notable progress in the field of empowerment of women. Nevertheless, India's corporate sector continues to confront numerous obstacles in effectively empowering women. This investigation aims to look into the principal issues and challenges that hinder women's empowerment within India's corporate industries. In the past, India's corporate sectors have been predominantly male-dominated, with the majority of leadership positions being held by men. Positions this gender pay gap exists across all industries. In addition, detrimentally affects women's advancement and opportunities for advancement. Despite initiatives and regulations from the government aimed at promoting gender diversity and equality, a persistent gender gap exists in corporate America's workplace leadership roles.

### Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment refers to policies and measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in the lives of people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting (again) on their own authority. Empowerment refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and eventually use their resources and chances. Empowerment is a multidimensional process, which should enable women or group of women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres

of life (Surekharao and Rajamanamma, 1999). It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. Generally development with justice is expected to generate the forces that lead to empowerment of various sections of population in a country and to raise their status specially in case of women.

“Empowerment comes from Women’s groups who seek to empower themselves through greater self-reliance. They have right to determine their own choices in life. They also seek to gain control and access to resources”. Empowerment is process, which helps people to gain control of their lives through raising awareness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control. Empowerment is the feeling that activates the psychological energy to accomplish one’s goals (Indiresan, 1999). The term ‘empowerment’ has till-date not been very explicitly defined and it may be assumed that based upon context the term may be interpreted contextually & situational. However, in context of women, empowerment essentially refers to a feeling of awareness of one’s own situation backed up with the knowledge, skills and information which could enable women to gain higher self-esteem and facilitate their role as decision makers in the current patriarchal society where women have always been subordinate to men. Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities.

### **Scope of the Study**

Analyzing the prevailing gender disparity within corporate sectors about representation, leadership positions, equitable compensation, promotions, and opportunities for professional advancement. Identifying the various forms of discrimination and biases encountered by women in corporate sectors, such as unconscious bias, stereotype threat, the glass ceiling, and maternal bias. Examining the influence of workplace culture, policies, and practices on the empowerment of women, encompassing concerns such as work-life balance, support systems, parental leave, and the creation of harassment-free environments. Investigating the societal and cultural factors that contribute to the challenges faced by women in corporate sectors, including societal norms, gender roles, cultural stereotypes, and gender expectations. Assessing the level of awareness and advocacy programs about the empowerment of women in corporate sectors, encompassing the role of government initiatives, corporate social

responsibility, and women-led organizations. Evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and regulations aimed at promoting the empowerment of women, such as laws against workplace discrimination, reservation quotas, maternity benefits, and company diversity initiatives.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the key issues and challenges faced by women in their professional lives
2. To examine the impact of gender biases and discrimination on career growth and advancement of women
3. To analyze the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment in corporate sectors

### **Research Methodology**

This paper primarily adopts a descriptive and analytical approach. Its objective is to analyze the concept of women's empowerment in India. The data utilized in this study is exclusively derived from secondary sources, selected by the study's requirements.

### **Need for Women Empowerment in the Corporate Sector in India**

- Gender equality is a crucial aspect of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender. In India, where women constitute almost half of the population, empowering them in the corporate sector is essential to enable their full participation in economic activities and contribute to the country's growth and development.
- The corporate sector can tap into a vast pool of talent and skills by empowering women, many of whom possess valuable expertise in various fields and are highly educated. By providing them with equal opportunities for professional growth, the corporate sector can benefit from their contributions.

### **Issues and Challenges of Women's Empowerment in India**

1. Gender bias and stereotypes: Gender biases and stereotypes continue to endure within the corporate realm, resulting in the unjust treatment of women in terms of recruitment, career progression, and remuneration. Frequently, women are unjustly regarded as less capable or unsuitable for specific positions, thereby constraining their prospects for professional growth.
2. Lack of access to education and skills development: The restricted availability of high-quality education and limited opportunities for skills development impede the

empowerment of women within corporate sectors. Numerous women face a deficiency in the essential qualifications and skills required to attain managerial or leadership roles.

3. Glass ceiling: The glass ceiling is an intangible obstacle that impedes women from attaining upper-echelon leadership roles. Despite possessing the requisite qualifications and competencies, women encounter challenges in surmounting this barrier and ascending to senior management positions.
4. Work-life balance: The task of maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between professional and personal spheres poses a substantial obstacle for women operating within the corporate domain. Frequently, women find themselves compelled to manage a multitude of obligations, encompassing caregiving and domestic tasks, thereby constraining their capacity to allocate sufficient time and energy toward their professional endeavors.
5. Harassment and discrimination: Sexual harassment and workplace discrimination targeting women are pervasive concerns that significantly impede their empowerment. These occurrences foster hostile work environments, thereby deterring women from actively pursuing and progressing in their professional endeavors.

### **Women Empowerment Schemes in India**

1. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative, which was introduced in 2015, aims to enhance the child sex ratio and encourage the education of girls. This program encompasses a combination of welfare schemes, awareness campaigns, and advocacy efforts.
2. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, also known as the Prime Minister's Maternity Benefit Scheme, offers financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women to compensate for wage loss during childbirth, ensure adequate nutrition, and care for both the mother and child.
3. The Mahila Shakti Kendra, established by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, seeks to empower rural women through skill development, employment generation, and advocacy for gender equality.
4. The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) supports women in various sectors, including agriculture, handicrafts, and cottage industries, by providing skill development and entrepreneurship training.

5. The Swadhar Greh scheme provides temporary shelter, rehabilitation, and support services to women facing challenging circumstances, such as victims of domestic violence, trafficking, or sexual exploitation.
6. The Ujjawala initiative is a comprehensive scheme aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking, rescuing and rehabilitating victims, and facilitating their reintegration into society after their ordeal.
7. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) promotes self-help groups among women, offering support for livelihood promotion, capacity building, and access to financial resources and markets.
8. Stand up India, launched by the Ministry of Finance, encourages entrepreneurship among women and marginalized communities by providing loans and support for establishing new enterprises.
9. The Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana is a program designed to incentivize parents to save for the education and marriage expenses of their female children. It offers a specialized deposit account with an elevated interest rate and tax advantages.
10. The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, also known as the National Credit Fund for Women, is an institution that facilitates the provision of micro-credit and financial services to women operating in the unorganized sector. This initiative empowers women to initiate or enhance their income-generating endeavors.

### **Findings**

- **Insufficient Representation:** The study has revealed that women are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles within the corporate sector of India. A mere fraction of women occupies top-tier positions, indicating the existence of a glass ceiling.
- **Gender-Based Stereotyping:** Women encounter gender-based stereotypes that impede their progress in the corporate world. They are often perceived as less assertive, capable, and committed than their male counterparts, resulting in fewer opportunities for promotion and career advancement.

### **Suggestions**

- **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** It is imperative for corporations to actively promote diversity and inclusion by establishing targets for the representation of women in leadership positions. The implementation of policies such as mandatory gender diversity on boards can significantly contribute to creating a more inclusive corporate environment.

- **Bias Training and Awareness Programs:** To overcome gender-based stereotypes, organizations should conduct bias training workshops and awareness programs. These initiatives can sensitize employees towards gender biases and promote a more equitable work environment.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

In September 2024, women held 10.4% of CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies, with 52 women serving as CEOs. In India, the representation of women in top executive roles is notably lower. A study published in March 2024 revealed that only 1.6% of companies listed on the Fortune India 500 had women at the helm. This figure was slightly higher, at 5%, for companies in the Fortune India Next 500 list. The representation of women in Indian corporate board has increased over the past five years, but it remains below the global average ratio. It is because of lack of conscious efforts on the part of corporate organizations to nurture and groom women for their empowerment to achieve senior management roles. The findings of the study indicate that the advancement of women in the corporate sectors of India is still confronted with considerable obstacles. These obstacles arise from inadequate representation, gender-based preconceptions, and difficulties in balancing work and personal life, and insufficient support systems. Gender discrimination is one such issue which is not yet been resolved completely and it should be the addressed by both government and private concerns. The corporate should follow the rules stringently concerning to sexual harassment. Companies can concentrate on special training facilities to women as a part of corporate social responsibility for enhancing their skills and confidence levels. Capacity-building efforts should pay particular attention to the needs of women in order to ensure that their skills and experience are fully used in decision-making at all levels. Nevertheless, organizations can surmount these challenges and promote the empowerment of women in the corporate world by implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives, conducting bias training, introducing flexible work policies, and providing mentorship and networking opportunities. The creation of a more inclusive and equitable corporate environment will not only benefit women but also enhance the overall success and growth of organizations.

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