GENDER DYNAMICS IN LABOUR DISTRIBUTION: A STUDY OF EQUALITY AND PERFORMANCE IN INDIAN START-UP TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

Indian entrepreneurship has seen rapid changes over the past few decades. With the improvement of the Indian education system, universities have increased graduation rates, leading to a better educated workforce. With these changes come an influx of well-educated women who make space for themselves within business and entrepreneurship, taking advantage of India's vast resources, and solidifying their status as brilliant. This influx, however, comes with a variety of challenges that pose as barriers to entry for women. Despite steps taken by individual corporations and the government, women still face issues like gender discrimination and workplace harassment that prevent them from wholeheartedly joining the workforce. Future directions towards improving these conditions for women may include providing more flexibility within a job or a role to make it seem more appealing to female candidates, as well as improving the state of STEM education and financial literacy in schools. This will allow women to develop higher levels of confidence when attempting to beak into a male-dominated sphere.

Keywords: Diversity, Indian business, Labour distribution, Start-up culture, Women in business.

I. Introduction

Startups and ground-up business ventures have taken the world by storm in recent decades. With the younger members of a population being encouraged to seek solutions for novel problems that emerge with the development of new environments, the term 'start-up culture' has become synonymous with ambition, development, and in many cases, success. Globally, these ventures have begun to prove themselves to not only be lucrative, but to pose as a way for the young, driven, and business-minded members of the population to turn their skills into something tangible. In developing countries, such as India, startup culture has taken root and has blossomed into economic excellence for both individual ventures and for the country as a whole. With a population of over a billion people, and a GDP of over half a trillion dollars, India ranks as the

11th largest economy in the world (Kapur&Ramamurti, 2001). Due to the vastness in its population, India struggles to accommodate all members of working age in the workforce. Due to the rise in Indian start-up culture in the early 21st century, however, economists have observed a notable increase in global interest in India's start-up environment, with higher demand for global investment into the country. Thus, at this stage, India has proven to be an upcoming hub for domestic and global ground-up ventures- demonstrating the economic prowess and innovation of the younger generation of Indian businesspeople (Kapur&Ramamurti, 2001).

However, in the scheme of up-and-coming business ventures, it is important to recognise the role of women in a largely male-dominated sphere, and not only acknowledge their representation, but also the ways in which they have allowed themselves and the Indian start-up community to flourish. Start-ups, by nature, tend to be homogenous units, with entrepreneurial teams comprising of either only men or only women (Brattström, 2019). This is, however, information that has been emerging due to the novelty of the business star-tup research field. The reality of team composition in start-ups tends to favour more male dominated spaces. However, in recent years, women have not only begun to carve themselves space in the workforce and in start-up culture, but have also started creating roles for themselves that cater better to their skillsets, expertise, and come with additional benefits that allow them to flourish in the workforce.

The aim of this paper is to understand the gender dynamics in the Indian start-up environment, and how women are contributing highly to ground-up business ventures. Additionally, this paper will explore the sorts of roles available within start-up ventures, and which ones seem more attractive to women and for what reason.

II. Background

Business in its entirety was originally a fairly male-centric domain. However, in the coming of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as women became more independent, and started seeking more opportunities to apply themselves in practical areas of work, they too began entering the workplace in a non-traditional sense. India itself has seen a large rise in the number of women who work, with a growing comm unity of female-led start-ups becoming pioneers in their respective fields of work.

Taking a step back, we may look at the way women have started creating space for themselves, not only in the world of business, but in industries such as law, finance, and entrepreneurship. The world of law in India, for example, has seen a steep increase in the number of women going to law school, as well as continuing their work and being hired at the largest, and most prestigious of Indian law firms. AmarchandMangaldas, one of India's premier law firms, reported that of the thirteen senior associates promoted to partner, around seventy percent of this

number were women (Ballakrishnen, 2013). In comparing today's work environment within law with the way things were just a few decades ago, we can see a monumental shift from gender discriminatory practices and exclusionary policies, to a workplace that is gender egalitarian. Women have, in recent years, not only begun to secure a large percentage of seats at leading universities in India, but have also been seen to apply themselves a lot more competitively to the job application processes, thereby securing larger numbers of jobs at top and more sought-after workplaces (Ballakrishnen, 2013). The Indian legal profession is seen as more resistant to feminisation than its global counterparts, and so this recent shift of women into the law industry proves to be a point of great pride for the industry and the country as a whole.

With the influx of women into the workplace, it is natural to wonder just how the idea of female leadership has changed and shaped itself into what it is now. Do people still view women as homemakers and pillars of the traditional family life? Or have women started becoming synonymous with leadership? To test this, Duehr& Bono (2006) examined gender and management stereotypes of male, female and student managers. The results showed a significant change in the mindset of managers of both sexes towards women, moving towards higher levels of acceptance and a stronger endorsement of leadership characteristics for women (Duehr& Bono, 2006). This shift in mindsets and attitudes towards women shows that not only have women fought for and maintained a positive role in the workplace, but have made it clear that they are to be valued. With the growing nature of the Indian entrepreneurial sector, young women bring fresh perspective to business ventures, with ideas for innovation that strive for far more than what has been seen in traditional business settings. Women as leaders within business, therefore, have started to live up to, and exceed the expectations of their peers and of the general public. Gone are the days of the homemaker with no financial stilts upon which she could lean. Instead, India looks forward to a society of individuals with equitable levels of power and authority, coming to light both within the workplace and the household.

III. Discussion

On discussing what it looks like in the present to have women in the workplace, it is also important for us to understand the types of challenges that did and may still pose as barriers to entry for women and minorities in India to join the workforce. The primary challenges posited to women included a lack of access to education in the early days of female work revolution. Due to their inability to gain a quality education such as that of their male counterparts, women were limited to either homemaking, or unskilled labour (Branch & Davis, 2018). However, after access to education began spreading to young girls and women, entering the workplace was still no small feat. Firstly, male managers and employees possessed a mindset that posited that the workplace was no place for women (Duehr& Bono, 2006). This resulted in both overt and covert types of discrimination, which strongly discouraged women from working in male-dominated

spheres, which at the time, were most domains of business outside of administration. In the present day, however, the government and society as a whole, guided not only by internal principles, but also by the example of the West, have decided to see through the implementation of policy and mechanisms within the business to ensure that inadvertent or deliberate discrimination towards women and minorities is not felt during any part of the work process. This includes from when a job interview is conducted, to when an employee decides to move on from the company. On the formation of gender-sensitive policies, Bacchi& Eveline (2010) argue that the introduction of policy that penalises gender discrimination in the workplace and its mechanisms open up for *discursive positioning*, or the presentation of 'roles' (either 'man' or 'woman') that individuals may adopt or resist, which impacts interpersonal interaction, as well as the meanings attached to said interactions. For example, anti-harassment policies in the workplace do not just protect women from workplace harassment, but also allows them a safety net that prevents such incidences taking place again due to a harasser's fear of a negative label being applied to them. This label may prevent them from finding employment elsewhere, and at the very least, may alienate them from the rest of their peers at the organisation. At start-up ventures, that involve a smaller team of employees to begin with, this may pose as a larger threat to a potential harasser, allowing for a welcoming environment to women who wish to join the entrepreneurial sector.

On the topic of female integration, it is also important to understand the types of jobs and roles that women may be more attracted to in this day and age. The reasons for this attraction may vary, and they may include, but are not limited to, more flexibility in work hours, better or equal pay to their male counterparts, and more female-friendly work environments. Barbulescu& Bidwell (2012) examined the kinds of roles available in the workforce, and examined which ones attracted more men or women. The constraints based on gender that the authors decided to take note of affected three determinants of job applications. First, how the applicants perceive the reward offered by each job; second, whether they identify with those jobs; and third, whether they believe their application will be successful. The authors found that there was indeed a gendered difference in the jobs that men and women decide to apply to, with women being less likely to apply to jobs in finance and consulting, and being more likely to apply to jobs in management. This is theorised to be because women seek jobs with better work-life balance, avoid jobs that identify as more masculine, and tend to have lower expectation in the acceptance of their applications to said roles (Barbulescu& Bidwell, 2012). There is, however, no evidence to support women's anxieties about failing to be offered a job in these fields, as job offer rates are similar to those of males in said fields. Therefore, the factors that tend to drive women away from certain fields tend to be fairly based on internalised stereotypes.

A good example of the inclusion of women in the workplace would be that of Kerala and their strife for higher levels of female engagement in the workplace. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Kerala is an organisation devoted towards promoting female entrepreneurship and the building of skills within the female workforce. Through programs that encapsulated various forms of professional development and financial literacy, SEWA enabled the female workforce to find dignity in their work, and pride in the efforts they were taking to become professionalised (Moghe, 2013). As a result, Kerala has now become one of the leaders in India's strife for a more gender-inclusive workforce. The work of SEWA has proven that with a little bit of development and skill-building, governments can provide esteemed platforms for women and minorities to develop both entrepreneurial spirit, and a desire to join the workforce and gain dignity in their work. This is very important for countries whose populations strive for growth and development, at both an individual and global level. Furthermore, the inclusion of women and minorities in the workforce not only allows for population development, but also allows for more diversity in workplaces and start-ups. This may allow for a better, more comprehensive set of ideas being generated within the entrepreneurial sector, and may also allow businesses to tap into consumer bases that may have proven to be mysterious to them due to a lack of diversity in their workforce.

IV. Conclusion

It is very clear at this point that women are a very valuable part of business and start-up culture in India. The steps taken by the government towards economic liberalisation have suggested that India's strengths lie not in unskilled labour and back-office operations, but in skill-intensive tradeable services (Kapur&Ramamurthi, 2001). With the rise in the number of students attending and graduating from top universities in India, it is no surprise that a shift in demand from unskilled and labour-intensive manufacturing strategies to skilled services has been seen in recent decades. Due to the rise in levels of education, women have also been seen to be a large part of this shift. That being said, though there have been considerable efforts made to ensure their inclusion in an egalitarian and equitable work culture, barriers to entry still pose as threats to women who aspire to enter the workforce. Therefore, it is important to understand what future directions governments and businesses should take to ensure more diversity in workplaces.

Firstly, it is important to identify those industries that attract women, and understand the reasons for it. As suggested by Barbulescu& Bidwell (2012), women are attracted to job roles that allow them higher rates of flexibility, and those that they identify with as less male-dominated roles. In response to this, companies and governments can make efforts to allow more flexibility in their hours and parental leave policies. Furthermore, the process of showing women and young girls that they're capable of just as much as men are starts in elementary school. Bootcamps centred

around financial literacy, job awareness, and female integration into the sciences have proven to be effective ways to integrate women into sectors that they are generally excluded from.

Though major steps have been taken towards diversifying start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures in India, a lot of work is yet to be done. It is the hope of the youth that women may feel the freedom of being able to join a team, express their ideas, and make their mark on the business world with no barriers to their success.

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