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Research Papers

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## WOMEN RIGHTS IN CORPORATE SECTOR

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### Abstract

*A right is a freedom of some kind. It is something to which you are entitled by virtue of being human. Human rights are based on the principle of respect for the individual. Their fundamental assumption is that each person is a moral and rational being who deserves to be treated with dignity. They are called human rights because they are universal. Whereas nations or specialized groups enjoy specific rights that apply only to them, human rights are the rights to which everyone is entitled—no matter who they are or where they live—simply because they are alive.*

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Yet many people, when asked to name their rights, will list only freedom of speech and belief and perhaps one or two others. There is no question these are important rights, but the full scope of human rights is very broad. They mean choice and opportunity. They mean the freedom to obtain a job, adopt a career, select a partner of one's choice and raise children. They include the right to travel widely and the right to work gainfully without harassment, abuse and threat of arbitrary dismissal. They even embrace the right to leisure.

The term "women's human rights" and the set of practices that accompanies its use are the continuously evolving product of an international movement to improve the status of women. In the 1980s and 1990s, women's movements around the world formed networks and coalitions to give greater visibility both to the problems that women face every day and to the centrality of women's experiences in economic, social, political and environmental issues. In the evolution of what is becoming a global women's movement, the term "women's human rights" has served as a locus for praxis, that is, for the development of political strategies shaped by the interaction between analytical insights and concrete political practices. Further, the critical tools, the concerted activism, and the broad-based international networks that have grown up around movements for women's human rights have become a vehicle for women to develop the political skills necessary for the twenty-first century.

The concept of women's human rights owes its success and the proliferation of its use to the fact that it is simultaneously prosaic and revolutionary. On the one hand, the idea of women's human rights makes common sense. It declares, quite simply, that as human beings women have human rights. Anyone would find her or himself hard-pressed to publicly make and defend the contrary argument that women are not human. So in many ways, the claim that women have human rights seems quite ordinary. On the other hand, "women's human rights" is a revolutionary notion. This radical reclamation of humanity and the corollary insistence that women's rights are human rights have profound

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transformative potential. The incorporation of women's perspectives and lives into human rights standards and practice forces recognition of the dismal failure of countries worldwide to accord women the human dignity and respect that they deserve—simply as human beings. A woman's human rights framework equips women with a way to define, analyze, and articulate their experiences of violence, degradation, and marginality. Finally, and very importantly, the idea of women's human rights provides a common framework for developing a vast array of visions and concrete strategies for change

This presentation revolves around the growing role of women in corporate sector and at the same time highlight the role of corporate sector in protecting and promoting rights of a women while at work.

Women in the Indian society still looks towards the society to grant them power or empower them in various ways be it financial, social, cultural, legal or political. 21st century women are now have become vital part & parcel of society. Situation of women changed completely in the last 30 years. The year 1970 marked the year of development of women. Women made up more than half the world's population, produced 80 percent of its food, laboured for two-thirds of its working hours, were paid 10 per cent of its income and owned one per of its property. These figures manifold forms of the disadvantaging and discrimination of women. Such as

- Unjust division of burdens of families.
- The economic exploitation of women.
- The loss of their control over resources
- The unequal rating of paid and unpaid work.

Despite the economic advantages of achieving gender equality in the corporate sector, inequalities persist across the region. Women have started to outnumber men in tertiary education in the region, but they remain underrepresented in employment, particularly in management and decision-making positions. Women have different labour market participation patterns than men. Across the region, women tend to have lower economic activity rates than men, are concentrated in fewer occupations, work fewer hours in paid employment (due to higher prevalence of part-time working) and have more career interruptions, largely due to care responsibilities. These differences contribute to lower earnings (gender pay gap) and slower career progressions. Furthermore, the disadvantages accumulate over the lifetime to lower pensions in old age. Women are less represented in formal employment than men. According to estimates from the International Labour Office (ILO 2009, Table A5) the female adult employment-to-population ratio (aged 25 and above) in 2008 was 51 per cent for women compared to 70.5 per cent for men in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and 50.4 per cent for women compared to 67.5 per cent for men in the European Union (EU) and other UNECE Member States signifying a significant gender employment gap in the region.

Women are making their presence felt in every field. Making general statements on the correlation of the impacts of social development and the situation of woman is very difficult because the political, economic and cultural framework conditions differ greatly from one country to another. However, discrimination against woman manifests in itself in most traditional as well as modern societies as a structural feature. Nowhere in the world are woman treated “as good as” men, and all countries slip on the scale of human development when inequality between sexes is measured. As corporate social responsibility deals with corporate's responsibility towards society, talking about women workforce become equally important.

#### **HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY STRENGTHS OF INDIAN WOMEN AS MANAGERS**

- Ability to network with colleagues
- Ability to perceive and understand situations
- Strong sense of dedication, loyalty and commitment to their organizations
- Ability to multitask
- Collaborative work style—solicit input from others, with respect for ideas
- Crisis management skills
- Willingness to share information (interactive leadership style)
- Sensitivity in relationships (e.g., compassionate, empathetic, understanding)

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**Behaving in a gender-neutral manner**

Corporate world now recognises women in every possible area in which it functions be it an employee, a manager, an owner/shareholder, a professional, a supplier, a customer or a dealer. Gender equality in the corporate sector is not only desirable on human rights grounds, but also makes good business sense. In recent years, the number of studies analysing the business implications of measures to enhance gender equality and diversity has grown. A number of studies have highlighted positive correlations between gender diversity in management teams and financial performance. Research has shown that women constitute a significant untapped source of new managerial and executive talent. The creation of better opportunities for women provides firms with access to a wider talent pool. McKinsey and Company (2007) found that gender diversity in senior management correlates with "organizational excellence" as measured by a set of criteria including: leadership, direction, accountability, coordination and control, innovation, external orientation, capability, motivation, work environment and values. The study found that companies with more than three women in senior management functions score more highly, on average, for each organizational criterion of "excellence" than companies with no women at the top.

Recognising the role and importance of women, some companies have played a remarkable campaigns for women empowerment. Few of them are:-

**HUL's SHAKTI**

o SHAKTI means 'Strength'. Project SHAKTI is HUL's initiative to upliftment of standard of living in rural India by creating income-generating capabilities for underprivileged rural women by providing a small-scale enterprise opportunity, and to improving rural lives through health Hygiene awareness. Project SHAKTI is taken up in rural areas only whereby women are the distributors for HUL products and are called "Shakti Ammas". This identity is ushering prosperity in their lives and most importantly self-respect.

**Project DRISHTI**

o where Whisper helped to restore eyesight to 250 blind girls through corneal transplant operations in which P&G contributed Re 1 for every pack of whisper sold Project open minds to support and educate children across the Australia, ASEAN and the India (AAI) region. For every large size pack of Vicks Vaporub, Whisper, Ariel Power Compact, Head & Shoulders and Pantene purchased by consumers during November 1999 to January 2000,

**Avon**

o Avon Cosmetics' commitment to women runs deeper than the boundaries of business. Women are the heart of Avon's success and Avon continues to support and understand their needs through Avon's Breast Cancer Crusade. The goal of the Avon Foundation Breast Cancer Crusade is to improve access to quality breast health care for underserved, uninsured and low income populations, and to support biomedical research focused on prevention and improved methods of Diagnosis and treatment to Cure and prevent breast cancer.

Today woman face lot of challenges in workplace despite the so called "equality". If one looks at the ratio of men and woman making it to the top it is really disturbing. Woman specially working mothers at times are denied position of higher responsibility because their employers think that she will not be able to live up the responsibility because she has a small kid. Bottom line is we have to pay the cost if we attempt to balance our work and family life. Yet another important challenge is the timing for corporate women. That too Indian Family system demands more time at home in order to nurture the family. In spite of having maids and cooks, the family/society expects the presence of women makes important. Working women especially from the corporate sector face the problems of Glass ceiling, sticky floor and many other challenges. To add to all this, the role at home and the conflicts that arise in balancing the dual role is something only a woman can explain. Besides this, malechauvinist attitude is a hurdle which women finds in their professional life. And a bunch of malechauvinists would mean the lady is almost done! The temptation is always to pull the legs of a lady who enjoys power. Safety of women travelling at night is still a big problem, and may be a limiting factor in her growth. In current times, a woman has to stand up for herself, make her choices, feel empowered. Cases of sexual

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harassment at work places are increasing day by day.

Here are some of the common incidents that take place every now and then in most renowned MNC's

A pretty girl, CA, single, very decent family, carried herself well, became an eyes sore to her boss only because he didnt like an intelligent woman subordinate. Tried his best to make each day unhappy. She quit as soon as she got a good offer. She mentioned this in her exit interview. Her HOD didnt do anything about it till today.

A pretty woman. Mother of a toddler, intelligent, hardworking, always had the best of terms with colleagues and bosses, became the object of her HOD's attention. One day he told her ' You come from a good family, u are intelligent, u work hard, are outstanding, but your only problem is that you dont come to ME. Look at Ms xyz she sits in my cabin even after office hours'. This woman replied ' I come to this office only for work'. She spent the next 5 years in hell and finally quit. Her boss tried to protect her from the HOD, filled a written report (there were other harassments too) to the unit head but got transferred in the bargain. That report disappeared. Her next boss also tried to project her outstanding work and try and ensure her promotions dont get blocked, but he himself started getting harassed. The probem was that this HOD had good terms with the higher management.

There was another smart woman who faced problems because her HOD and boss felt that women should be at home rather than at office and women should leave office jobs for men. She quit after working for a couple of years.

Male chauvinism is a big big problem. So women who carry themselves well, choose to quit rather than undergo such nonsense.

In the light of these observations, what are the current critical issues that need to be addressed? What measures will the corporate sector take to harness the skills of more and more educated and talented women for executive jobs? Of what magnitude and quality will the incentives given to them be, in order to attract their interest, and thereafter, ensure their continued loyalty? Will these incentives be attractive enough for self- employed professionals such as those in medicine, law, politics and finance to forego their freedom to join the world of business? How will the companies minimise the role conflict for women executives so that neither their performance nor their loyalty are affected? How can the corporate roles of women managers be effectively performed while addressing their needs of self-esteem and upward mobility? Where merit and performance dictate success and upward mobility, companies must necessarily adopt "women friendly" policies while addressing all these issues.

Corporate social responsibility towards women empowerment can become ray of hope in many ways. Here are some recommended HR Management Practices to Create a "Women-Friendly" Organization

Senior management commitment to gender issues

Career development programs for women

Exposure of women to top management

Leadership development programs for women

Job rotation for women

Recruitment of women at senior-level positions

Regular survey of women to assess job satisfaction

Mentoring programs for women

Child care facilities at work

Corporate should undertake more number of campaigns like DRISHTI and SHAKTI for women empowerment.

Supportive attitude towards working women by Indian society is need of the hour. Women related issues need important attention from government and society as well. Some suggestions they might create a comfortable and supportive atmosphere for Women

A supportive family, both before and after marriage, is a key factor for Indian professional women to succeed

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