EDITORIAL

GENDERED DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMIC POWER IN INDIA

Despite decades of attention from both the academic and business communities to gender imbalances in the distribution of economic power, women around the world are still in a less favourable situation than men – they are segregated in sectors, occupations, types of jobs and positions that attract lower prestige and financial remuneration. While women have considerably increased their share in the workforce, the data and analyses available in the last two decades with respect to entrepreneurs and managers show the continuing scarcity of women holding senior decision-making positions, such as CEOs and board members. When it comes to top positions like the chairperson of boards, the figures generally establish the share of women sitting at the helm of boards across the globe at zero to a few percent (Carter and Silva, 2010; Statistical Overview of Women in the Workplace, 2016). India and Slovenia are two very different countries, yet share similarities regarding the position of women in top management. Among companies listed on the Mumbai Stock Exchange 100, the majority (54%) have no women board members at all. Women hold just 7.7% of board seats and only 2.7% of chairs on boards (Statistical Overview of Women in the Workplace, 2016). In the 20 biggest publicly-traded companies in Slovenia, 20% of board members are women and 5% chair the board (EU database, 2016).

This situation persists even though gender equality has become a universal societal norm. In many countries, women have overcome the obstacles to being promoted to (senior) managerial positions on the individual level by attaining a suitable level and type of education, work and managerial experience, ambition etc. There are thus widespread calls for necessary changes to be made on the organisational and institutional levels. New initiatives range from advancing transparent promotion/nomination practices and mentoring/sponsoring programmes through to the introduction of more binding instruments to ensure gender equality is achieved, such as quotas for decision-making positions. There is growing recognition that such changes should be accelerated because the 'natural' pace has proven to be too slow. To hasten progress here, several countries have introduced mandatory quotas for women on company boards, with Norway being the first to do so (Huse, 2011). Other countries (including India, the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan and Slovenia) have adopted a variety of measures to promote the presence of more women in management, such as by including gender-diversity and reporting requirements in corporate governance codes, codes of conduct and voluntary targets. Achieving gender equality in the highest economic decision-making positions would directly impact the distribution of economic power by reducing the universally seen gender vertical segregation and gender pay gap. It would also have a great symbolic influence since women who hold top decision-making positions are role models for not only other (younger) women aspiring for managerial careers but also other positions in public life and paid work.

When striving to improve the gender balance in senior management and decision-making, we are still surprised by the number of biases and barriers often encountered on multiple levels. It seems that in order to determine how best to achieve a gender balance, we still must find better answers concerning why is that needed. Since in practice the success of measures and initiatives is connected to, if not entirely dependent upon, the battle of arguments, the way the most common arguments used against any acceleration of the required changes are addressed is important. The discussion of measures stimulating a gender balance in economic decision-making is one example in which arguments are confronted on the need and mode for supporting gender economic equality. The same or similar arguments are used when discussing other organised efforts to change the current state of affairs that prevents women from achieving an identical economic position as men.

In countries that introduced quotas to stimulate a greater gender balance in economic decision-making, two arguments were mostly employed – general fairness and the business argument (Seierstad, 2016). Quotas are supported as a mechanism to help eliminate structural discrimination against women, to compensate or counterbalance the barriers or existing prejudices which prevent women's access to the highest positions of power, to help organisations understand women's experiences, and to better respond to market demands. The critics of quotas argue they are may be questioned with regard to the principles of meritocracy, legitimacy and the nature of the changes they induce. Critics point out the tendency of quotas to promote essentialism, that quotas are opposed to the principle of equal opportunities and promote women based on their gender and not their qualifications or merits (Mansbridge, 2005; Jones, 2005; Bush, 2011). Although gender equality is never explicitly disputed, arguments against any more effective ways of achieving a gender balance are based on stereotypes and unfounded assumptions about men and women. Moreover, even some of the arguments in support of the mechanisms for improving a gender balance in decision-making are also based on the very same assumptions.

The article by Soumi Rai in this issue discusses how overcoming gender-based distinctions may help in finding better solutions for bringing about gender equality. A special value of Rai's contribution is the discussion on the mechanisms supporting gender bias that are embedded in the Indian historical and societal context.

The introduction of instruments that facilitate change (such as quotas) needs to be promoted as a temporary step to allow competent people to be promoted regardless of their gender. Quotas must be seen and presented as a mechanism to help eliminate the invisible obstacles to gender equality, preventing the promotion of a less competent candidate solely on the basis of (male) gender (the 'glass escalator') or for supporting an equally competent female candidate whose promotion would otherwise be blocked only due to their gender (the 'glass ceiling'). In order to bring to light the fear that gender quotas could harm business (implicit in frequent statements that competence and not gender should be considered when selecting managers), special attention should be paid to presenting the business argument. Instead of arguing that women should be appointed for their specific 'female' characteristics and advantages, the business argument should highlight the likely harm to business if talented and competent women are disregarded because of their gender.

Rashmi Ranjan Parida in the paper in this issue "Is gender relevant in management?" reveals that Indian managers and students of management, both male and female, regard gender as important for different aspects of the distribution of economic power (recruitment, allocation of responsibility, authority and rewards), while being mostly seen as a synonym for biological sex. Author concludes that education on gender as a socially constructed concept is a necessary part of managerial education.

The selection of articles in this issue of Teorija in praksa (*Theory and Practice*) reveals women's position in the labour market and in decision-making positions in India. The research performed and the literature reviewed enable the general discussion on the economic position of women to be situated in a specific economic and cultural environment about which European readers have little information. The rich data provided by the contributions give insights that nourish the discussion on the balance of factors that create the gendered power structure of economies, some of which are universal while others are historically, politically and culturally specific. Certain articles tackle the position of women in management directly, while others give information about women's position in other occupations and in different sectors and parts of the Indian economy, all of which helps to understand that particular economy's gendered structure.

Parameswar Nayak's article shows how female managers in public and private sectors in India are perceived by their colleagues in terms of managerial effectiveness. The majority of corporate managers believe gender does impact managerial effectiveness. Although there are strong arguments for competencies, and not gender, being key factors in managerial effectiveness, men are still preferred for certain key roles such as top leadership, strategic decision-making, negotiation, handling risks and challenges. In contrast, women are found to be more effective than men in managing human resources, public relations and inter-personal relationships, leading to a better work–life balance. There is a lower preference for a female boss, even among a good number of female managers. However, being a boss in corporate organisations relies considerably on behavioural competencies more than any considerations of gender.

Vidya Pujari and Suchitra Pal write about the nursing profession that is, also by virtue of it becoming feminised, subject to a specific set of hazards. The authors reveal how care is particularly demanding in the Indian context, resulting in a high incidence of Indian nurses leaving the country, both a personal problem for nurses and a social issue facing a country that already suffers from a shortage of care-givers, especially in rural areas.

K. Saini and Rekha Mishra's paper on employment and development opportunities in the industrial town of Neermana shows how a gendered labour market structure is constructed and is hampering the full potential of industrial development being attained. The authors advise how the evident gender imbalances could be monitored and dealt with so as to achieve both gender equality and industrial progress.

Parameswar Nayak and Neeti Sharma's article provides an insight into the Indian academic world in which men have greater opportunities to achieve a work–life balance than their female colleagues. The article reveals the importance of families as support mechanisms for managing stress and offers a starting point for Indian business schools that are interested in updating their work–life balance and organisational culture policies.

We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to present this collection of scientific papers and two shorter contributions (the research papers by Parida as well as Saini and Mishra), all of which represent useful material for students, scholars and other readers interested in the situation confronting Indian organisations and society, especially the position of women in India.

Although this special issue focuses on research results giving useful insights into the social, economic and cultural determinants of gender equality in India while simultaneously tackling more universal topics, it contributes to the general discussion on the gendered distribution of economic power and the arguments used for achieving it. This makes the selection of articles highly relevant for the readers of Teorija in praksa (*Theory and Practice*).[1]

[1] *Articles were selected from contributions presented at the conference "Gender and Management: Issues and Challenges" organised by the Birla Global University and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana, in Bhubaneshwar, Odisha, India on 5–7 January 2017.*

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