

The Lack of Female Representation in Senior Positions: An Exploratory Study between South Africa and India

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Abstract : Worldwide, it seems as if women are adequately represented in government and parliament but are almost absent from governing boards of private enterprises. The reasons for this seem to be embedded in perceptions of inadequacy, remnants of patriarchy, glass ceilings and even female choice. Direct or indirect discrimination against females have been found to be one of the reasons that female employees are found in traditionally “softer” roles, whilst the old “Boy’s Club” is still operational to keep women out of senior managerial positions, especially in the private sector. The cultural construct of Indian society, focusing on male preference, patriarchy, divorce laws and low educational levels of females as opposed to men, is indicative of a society wherein high gender inequality still exists. The position in South Africa is similar in that substantive gender equality has not been reached despite a progressive constitution and anti-discrimination laws. There is a strong push to propel women to senior positions in South Africa, but these efforts have not yet translated into females taking up senior positions in private companies. In South Africa, females still earn less than their male counterparts whilst performing doing the same jobs, are overrepresented in parliament, but do not captain the ships in the private sector. The lack of female parity in employment leads to a lack of autonomy and authority in both South Africa and India. The divide between formal and informal work, unpaid work, mainly being done by women, need to be investigated to ensure substantive gender parity. The findings will show that females are still not equal to men in employment, especially in senior private positions; mainly due to the remnants of patriarchy and glass ceilings that still need to be shattered. This article aims to set out the reasons why gender disparity still exists in India and South Africa, seen through a legal lense. Both countries are signatories to the CEDAW Convention and have constitutions that advocate for the right of equality. Although equal rights have been implemented in both countries, equality may not be well implemented. This investigation is comparative in nature and aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence on how to ensure gender parity in all occupational levels and categories. The study is in quantitative in nature. If substantive gender equality, as opposed to formative gender equality, is a key motivator to ensure gender equality, an investigation into the reasons for this disparity is warranted before suggestions can be tendered to effect lasting change. The aim of this comparative study is not to plug the legal system of one country into the other, but to take into account of the autonomy of choice, set against cultural differences and similarities in an effort to shatter the glass ceilings for women who aspire to climb the corporate ladders.

Keywords : gender inequality, glass ceilings, patriarchy, female disparity

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