1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Theories, researches and studies on Workforce diversity studies have increasingly found place in organizational studies in recent times. A large share of these studies in diversity deals with the issue of workplace discrimination concentrating on minorities and the others have mainly delved in implications and outcomes of diversity in terms of its effects on tangible organizational results. The influence and effects of the social, cultural, economic and legal environment on formation and consolidation of diversity dimensions is not explored much.

Workforce diversity studies in India mostly follows the trends of their western counterparts, especially in the area of study – Indian IT and ITES sector, in which majority of the diversity related studies are spearheaded by the industry associations or organizations in the sector. It is often not taken into account that these differences or diversity in organizations is a reflection of the social fabric and is meaningful only if the environment it functions in is taken into context. Diversity or differences, the imbalance of power among groups moves the issue of diversity outside the boundaries of an organization. An approach which takes into account the interrelated factors – social, political, economic, cultural will give a more holistic picture in explaining the effects and interplay of workforce diversity. This is reflected in the thoughts of several authors and researchers of diversity (Cox, 1995; Morrison, 1995). They urged that a more historical and contextualized approach to diversity would be appropriate to provide more insight in understanding diversity in organizations. Also another factor which I came across while conducting my initial literature review and exploration of the field was that majority of these organizational studies in IT and ITES sector concentrates heavily on the one particular dimension -Gender. Studies designed to explore other dimensions of diversity is minimal when compared to the volume of literature and studies available on gender diversity studies in Indian IT and ITES sector. Today in India and Indian IT and ITES sector, though gender is one of the prominent diversity dimensions in play, significance of other diversity dimensions cannot be overlooked.
Through this thesis ‘A study into the workforce diversity dimensions in India’ done in the context of the Indian IT& ITES sector my endeavour is to study the dynamics of diversity dimensions - Gender, Disability, and Nationality, Sexual orientation, Religion and caste in the Indian IT and ITES sector. These dimensions are primary in nature and have a profound impact on the diversity in a workplace. The research explores the current status of diversity with an intent to explore if or how much the aspects of Indian environment and the influence of its elements – Social, cultural, economic and legal have played a part in the formation and consolidation of the present day status.

1.2. Background of the Research Study

Experts in Workforce diversity studies have stressed the importance of assessing the diversity dimensions in a more holistic way. The essential and fixed conceptualization of ‘others’ denies the overarching influence of macro-level social, political and economic forces (Litvin, 1997). Each country or society varies from one another in many ways. These differences in terms of value systems, customs, social hierarchy, legal systems, and economic disparities among groups will have influence in shaping that nations or society’s diversity.

In case of India, India takes pride in being one of the oldest civilizations with a myriad of diverse culture, religion, beliefs and thoughts. With a 1.21 billion population, 22 officially recognized languages, several religions, various styles of art, architecture, literature, music and dance, and several lifestyles ranging from the urban and rural to the tribal, India is a melting pot of diversity.

In the past few decades, India’s economic, social and political fabric has gone through a lot of changes. Interesting aspects of modern India includes a young demographic profile, status as a major player in the world economy, increased participation of women in the mainstream, increased global exposure and attitudinal changes in conflation with enduring aspects of India’s socio-cultural system. The transitions as in all arenas of social life are reflected in the workforce of country, strong in some sectors and imperceptible in others. Indian IT and ITES sector showcases this transitional nature of workforce pattern. This sector contributes towards India’s buoyant economic growth and has a workforce which is a far cry from the typical, domestic male
oriented one usually found in Indian organizations. The workforce consist of a large number of women, people belonging to varied nationalities, practicing different religions and customs, speaking different languages, people who are differently able and having varied orientations. Global exposure due to opening up of economy, social and cultural changes induced through factors like changing mind-set, focus in education, increased opportunities, legislations and governmental initiatives provided an impetus to this phenomena.

To establish and maintain its competitive advantage Indian organizations in this sector should manage and positively harness its diverse workforce in view of changing social and economic climate. Taking into account the position of IT and ITES in Indian economy, India’s ability to sustain and grow as a super power will be affected by how well the organizations assimilates and addresses the element of diversity. Hence the issue of workforce diversity management is something that Indian IT and ITES sector cannot overlook. However, while several studies and deliberations on workforce diversity have been conducted in Indian IT and ITES sector, there have been few attempts to capture the significance of workforce diversity in a comprehensive manner. Studies conducted in this area mostly concentrated on the most apparent and visible diversity dimension in the sector - gender, and the narratives chiefly comprised descriptions of organizational initiatives. Efforts to explore the dynamics of workforce diversity in a composite manner have been few.

1.3. Objectives and Scope of the Research

The research work ‘A Study on Dimensions of Workforce Diversity in India’ conducted in the context of Indian IT and ITES sector focuses on exploring workforce diversity in the context of diversity Indian environment. The dimensions under study are Gender, Disability, Nationality, Sexual orientation, Religion and Caste. It aims to study the workforce diversity dimensions and portray their manifestations in the selected area of study – IT and ITES sector. Along with providing a report on the current state of inclusivity in IT and ITES sector it probes into the factors and circumstances that lead to the present state.
It is designed to

- Trace the evolution and significance of workforce diversity dimensions, Gender, Disability, Nationality, Sexual orientation, Religion and Caste in the context of Indian environment.
- The social, cultural, legal and political elements in Indian environment and their role in shaping and influencing the diversity patterns are explored.
- Explore the manifestations of these diversity dimensions in Indian IT and ITES sector and determine if they are significant to the industry.
- Collect and analyse pertinent information on organizational endeavours in IT and ITES sector addressing the diversity dimension under study.
- Collect and analyse pertinent information on diversity dimensions from the employee perspective.
- Interpret the information to provide a picture of the current state of inclusivity in the sector and identify the circumstances that led to the current state.
- Identify the areas of concern/improvement in the workforce diversity management in the sector.

As Indian IT and ITES sector functions in the realm of a global environment and the fact that Indian environment doesn’t function in isolation, global perspective on the diversity issues is taken into account while conducting the study.

More specifically, it is set out to answer the following questions.

1. What is the significance of Gender, Disability, Nationality, Sexual orientation, Religion and caste in India? Does the environment play an important role in deciding the diversity patterns and attitudes in a workplace? If so, what are the effects of the social, cultural, economic and legal environment on formation and consolidation of diversity dimensions in India?
2. Does the significance of these diversity dimensions in Indian environment translate in the same degree in the selected area of study – IT and ITES sector?
3. Is an appraisal of its workforce diversity initiatives an unavoidable strategic imperative for Indian organizations in IT and ITES sector? If so why?

4. What is the level of awareness the organization has regarding diversity initiatives?

5. Do the organizations in the Indian IT sector have a definite approach /policy towards managing workforce diversity?

6. Where does the sector stand in terms of policies and initiatives in terms of workforce diversity dimensions?

7. Do the unique characteristics of IT and ITES play a role in determining the significance and current status of workforce diversity dimensions in the industry?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study have significance and implications in several areas:

1. As Indian IT and ITES industry plays a major role in the economic growth of India, identifying workforce diversity dimensions relevant to the industry and assessing their status is pivotal to maintain the competitive advantage the sector has. The aspect of diversity has more prominence in this sector as employees or human resources are considered as the most crucial resources. Along with helping the organizations realize where they stand in terms of inclusivity and assimilation of each diversity dimension it will help them identify the areas that need improvement and devise strategies to address the intricacies involved.

2. IT and ITES industry is touted to be a preferable workplace for women. The industry is witnessing a substantial increase in the number of women employees. In this light it is significant to investigate the industry’s stand in gender related issues especially taking into account the nature of job in these sectors.

3. The study addresses the employability and assimilation of People with Disability in the sector. Indian IT and ITES industry as a job sector is suitable to employ people with disability. In this regard identifying how inclusive the sector is in regards to PWD assumes significance.
4. Expressions on sexual orientation though are fairly new grounds in India it is definitely going to one of the issues that Indian society and Indian organizations will have to encounter in the coming years. The present legal status of homosexuality in India brings the topic of addressing sexual orientation as a diversity dimension to the forefront. Also in other parts of the world sexual orientation is an accepted and openly discussed diversity factor. The section on sexual orientation gains significance in the view of its legal status in India and IT and ITES organizations ever increasing global presence.

5. The study also examines whether existing religious and caste inequalities are reflected, challenged or is a non-issue in IT and ITES industry.

6. Significance and influence of the socio-cultural, legal and political framework is elucidated through the course of research. This will help in identifying the amount of influence, each of these elements have in regards to shaping workforce diversity and finally the study will aid the interested groups – Government, Third party organizations and NGO’s in identifying the areas of concern and envisage the role they can play in setting it right.

1.5. Research Methods and Analyses

Research strategy is to adopt exploratory design with the intention of collecting pertinent information to answer the research questions that was formulated. This involved collecting information.

- To determine the significance of diversity dimensions Gender, Disability, Nationality, sexual orientation, Religion and caste in society and workplace and IT and ITES industry. Data on aspects of environment - legal, social cultural, political and third party associations was collected to understand the role they played in shaping the diversity elements in India.

- To learn about IT and ITES industry and Inclusivity endeavours in its organizations addressing workforce diversity
1.6. Type of Data – Primary and Secondary

Preliminary exploratory survey was conducted to determine the research techniques suitable to find information on the dynamics of the diversity dimensions.

To collect data pertinent to the diversity dimensions - Gender, Disability, Nationality, Sexual Orientation, Caste, Religion the following methodology was used.

- Survey – IT Companies.
- Focus group Interviews of IT & ITES employees
- Review of EEO and diversity policies of IT and ITES companies
- Structured interviews with HR Managers
- In-depth Interviews with Researchers, Experts and people belonging to particular group of diversity dimension in the study.

To interpret the role of environment and influence of third party associations following methodology was used

- Review and analysing major international treaties, landmark judgments, constitutional provisions, relevant workplace legislations in India and collecting information from sources like newspapers, internet, Journals and Magazines, Books, Reference materials, Journals, Electronic databases, Government publications to interpret the role of environment – Social, legal, political and cultural in the evolution of diversity dimensions under study involved. Data on the role and influence of third party associations (UN, NASSCOM, and NGO’s) was collected from similar secondary sources.

Note:
In total, workforce diversity practices and inclusivity endeavours of fifty organizations were analysed.
This along with the analyses of the employee perspectives and secondary sources formed the basis of the interpretations in this research