11. DISCUSSION

11.1. Preface / Opening Remarks

The previous chapters dealt with providing a portrait on the workforce diversity dimensions in IT and ITES sector. Examining the prominent diversity dimensions Gender, Nationality, Disability, Religion and caste, their manifestations in the industry and inclusivity endeavours on the part of organizations along with interpreting the current status of workforce diversity in Indian IT and ITES sector brought into focus some interesting findings. These facts widen the perspective on workforce diversity status of Indian IT and ITES industry. They are listed as follows:

11.2. Varying Levels of Diversity Awareness and Management

One thing apparent from the study is that the organizations exist in varying level of diversity awareness and focus regarding workforce diversity management. In the study, while looking into the organizational endeavours we found organizations who have directed significant efforts towards building an inclusive environment, but on the other hand there are organizations who in principle believe in providing a fair environment but are still is in infancy as far as creation of any concrete policies and practices are concerned. Various factors like commitment of the organization, magnitude of operations, international exposure, number of employees and resources can be attributed to explain this phenomenon. Organizations on the high end of the diversity/inclusivity spectrum mostly are big organizations with substantial manpower, worldwide operations and resources and the lower end of the spectrum is made up of organizations having operations limited mostly to India whose resources and exposure are much less compared to their counterparts. Also, along this, another detail discerned while studying the diversity dimensions in IT and ITES industry is the variation in extent of focus accorded towards each diversity dimension. From the depictions in the earlier chapters on each diversity dimensions it is clear that among the workforce diversity dimensions gender is indisputably the primary focus in Indian IT and ITES industry as far as organizational endeavours are concerned. The extent of gender inclusivity endeavours outruns the other diversity dimensions in the sector. Disability in the second spot is increasingly finding its place in diversity endeavours. Nationality plays a part as a diversity element only in case of multinational corporations. Big Indian players,
(in terms of scale of operation, international exposure and number of employees) with the international hiring policy are concentrating more on the aspect of nationality and its manifestations as a diversity dimension. Varied sexual orientation though always in existence to this date is neither identified nor addressed as a major diversity dimension in Indian IT and ITES sector. Religion/ caste are indirectly addressed as a part of corporate social responsibility. As the sanctions of affirmative quota are not applicable to private sectors in India, it is safe to say that the organizations will continue the present stance in regards to religion and caste.

Commenting on the present status of inclusivity in the organizations the sector though has made good progress as far as gender inclusivity and disability is concerned, have to go a long way in case of identifying and addressing other diversity dimensions. This gains importance in light of attitudinal changes in the society and increasing exposure of the industry. Please refer APPENDIX – D: INCLUSIVITY IN ORGANIZATIONS for details on the diversity policies in organizations

11.3. Approach in Inclusivity

Another aspect that I want to mention is that the industry is more reactive in its approach concerning the diversity and inclusivity measures. Setting up stringent guidelines and taking a more serious approach is often seen only after the onset of occurrence of some eye opening incident. Also the effort to delve deep into the matter and addressing it in a wholesome manner is not seen. This is true in several instances

Glass ceiling – The organizational studies conducted by the industry associations often portrayed the industry as the champions of gender inclusivity. This was true to some extent when only the number of women entering the workforce was considered. A closer look on how these numbers are dissipated among the levels of hierarchy in organization brought to attention the existence of glass ceiling or scarcity of women in the upper echelons.

Safety and security – It took anguishing incidents like murder, rape and assaults of women employees while returning home from work for the industry to realize the lapses and
inadequacy of the safety-security measures. These incidents prompted the industry to scrutinize and re-evaluate in making the safety and security measures more stringent.

Anti-sexual harassment measures – In light of Infosys harassment suit, NASSCOM framed guidelines for broad ethical norms to help companies adopt ethical practices and deal effectively if situations arise.

Disability Initiatives – Specific diversity initiatives on disability inclusivity was initiated by NASSCOM on organized industry wide scale after a survey by NCDEP was published which brought into light the dismal situation regarding the disability inclusivity.

Sexual orientation inclusivity measures – Indian societies and corporate worlds guarded and reticent attitude on dealing with such topics involving moral debate is replicated in the Indian IT and ITES industry. Legal standing in India on homosexuality might be another reason why Indian IT and ITES industry didn’t explicitly delve into this diversity dimension.

From all the above instances the reactive nature in which the industry approaches inclusivity is evident. Also the industry doesn’t put much effort in trying to delve deep and understand the dynamics of diversity dimensions. Gender is the one dimension that the majority of inclusivity practices are concentrated on. In my assessment of Indian IT and ITES industry, in terms of Gender inclusivity, it will be a stretch to conclude that Indian IT and ITES sector is at the desirable level. Sometime in future these organizations through their policies and support systems heralded by positive changes in the society will reach an ideal stage where women are able to attain their rightful place in the sector without having to compromise. The other dimensions, their significance are not fully explored by the industry. An approach which is proactive and more holistic is absolutely needed if IT and ITES sector wants to positively harness and address the diversity in its workplaces.
11.4. Role of Environment

Another aspect discerned from the study is the role of the environment in shaping the character and significance of diversity dimension in society and workplace, here in focus – IT and ITES industry. Several elements in the environment – social, cultural, economic, legal, political act as a source or play an important role in determining the extent and significance of diversity dimensions. In this study, instances relating to how environment influence, direct and sometimes dictate the pattern and evolution of diversity and level of inclusivity in a society and its workforce and specifically IT and ITES sector is depicted.

Regarding how the significance of the diversity dimension is translated in the industry, the changing attitudes and social status of women is reflected in Indian IT and ITES industry. The policies regarding gender inclusivity in organizations are framed in reflection to these changing patterns in the society. In case of nationality, the opening up of economy and the government embracing globalization opened up avenues for the sector to operate in a global environment which made nationality a significant diversity dimension in the industry. In regard to sexual orientation, the reticent attitude of the Indian society in openly discussing and accepting the diversity dimension is present in the sector too. Apart from the customary additions in diversity statements I haven’t come across any focused effort, not even towards identifying its presence or ascertaining the significance regarding sexual orientation. Even MNCs of foreign origin who are vociferous propagandist of people with varied sexual orientation in their countries of origin apart from extending sexual orientation as a part of their diversity statement does not seem to be actively pursuing this diversity dimension. Regarding the last dimension in the study, religion and caste, it is a paradox that in a country so much in strife due to religion and caste, these dimensions are mentioned the least in relation to workforce diversity management and inclusivity endeavours in Indian IT and ITES industry.

11.5. Third Party Associations

Third party associations and NGO’s play an important role in social system of a country. The impact of these organizations has on the work force diversity in Indian IT and ITES is visible in many instances throughout the thesis. Among the various professional bodies the organization
that made prominent and direct impact on inclusivity in IT and ITES sector in India is inarguably NASSCOM. (A detailed report on NASSCOM’s role in furthering inclusivity in Indian IT and ITES sector Appendix item no) Apart from NASSCOM, other agencies like National commission for women, NGO’s that impacted the inclusivity scene in Indian workplaces - Vishaka, NAZ Foundation (India) along with the international treaties and organizations either directly or indirectly have an impact on the inclusivity scene in India and Indian IT and ITES sector.

11.6. Industry Characteristics and Inclusivity

Another factor that influences diversity efforts in Indian IT and ITES sector is the nature of the industry - its job characteristics, Hours of operation, exposure. The significance industry characteristics have on Inclusivity in the sector is depicted in many instances throughout the thesis. Many policies to promote gender inclusivity are significant due the job characteristics which involve long and odd working hours, overseas deployment. Other aspects of diversity like nationality gains importance in the sector as it operate in the global environment. Endeavours on disability in the organizations are successful as employing PWD is a suitable option with technological assistance and reasonable adjustment. The industry as it falls under the private sector does not put any active efforts to seek if religion and caste is of any significance as a diversity dimension in the sector and as the sector has operations worldwide a global outlook on diversity is to be maintained. Thus along with the factors like environment, organization, professional associations / NGO’s, the characteristics of the industry too dictate the inclusivity pattern.

Hence it is not one but a combination of factors that determine the workforce diversity and inclusivity in India and Indian IT and ITES sector. The inclusivity in the sector is determined by the organizational outlook, the environment in which it operates the characteristics of the industry and professional bodies and associations. The explorations and findings from the research will help the organizations in developing wholesome inclusivity policies and programmes. Here I am not discounting the impact of personal attributes – the individual- who along with organizations, society, government and professional bodies decides the inclusivity.