



The Impact of the New Global Economy on Diversity in India

The new global order invites India to think vast and bold. Changing the mindsets of a billion people brought up in a nation of strong traditions and high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity is not a simple task. Yet, if we do not work consciously at letting go of our relatively minor differences and begin to recognise and appreciate the enormous strength of our diversity, we will miss the bus for achieving the ambitious goals that the nation have dared to dream.

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No other country in the world has India's diversity in terms of culture, languages, regions, religions and forms of social stratification. The cliché "Unity in Diversity" has often been used to describe India. Yet, a close look at the country tells us that this is more an aspiration than a ground reality for intercultural relations.

There was a time in India not so long ago when having the right social background was an important criterion to get a good job. Being proficient in English, assertive, well "turned out" and capable of refined cultural interaction were an unwritten set of requirements. This implied rule kept the best jobs for the privileged few. When people who did not fit the profile entered an organisation, they had to deal with a culture that was not designed for their success. Women, people from the lower castes or tribes, persons with dis-

abilities and those from socially disempowered groups were among faced this problem.

This unequal access to opportunities still exists due to a variety of reasons, yet economic necessity has driven some of these practices into the background as companies struggle to meet the growing demand for the talent needed to keep pace with the economic growth. Today, organisations are tracking talent. New and innovative techniques are being used to smoke them out of all corners of the state.

Globalization has changed the world and traditional mindsets of staying close to hearth and home is not relevant anymore to the ambitious and educated youth. And, companies in their hunt for talent are far more receptive and eager to have them irrespective of where they come from, how and in what form they come. This vast diversity

of people working in such close proximity is a recent experience for corporate India.

With liberalization, India is on an economic upswing. Women, people with disabilities and cross-regional employees from far flung places in India or abroad are no longer novelties in the workplace as a result of the emergence of the IT and IT enabled services sectors. This is India's new social reality.

Diversity means differences and differences mean conflicts. Even if they are not out in the open, under currents of it prevail in ways that lead to the creation of cliques and sub-groups in the workplace. North Indian, South Indian, regional language cliques or the IIM-ians and IIT-ians' hanging out only with their own ilk are some of the not-so-happy outcomes of this diversity at work. The remnants of our caste system and patriarchal traditions still play a role in society.