

# WORKFORCE DIVERSITY STATUS IN INDIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: A STUDY OF EMPLOYEES' REACTIONS

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**Abstract** *The public sector organizations have been at the forefront of valuing diversity. However, the attitudes and perceptions of diverse employees about organization's efforts to promote diversity still largely remain unanswered in the public sector. Therefore, this study is an attempt to investigate the differences in the perceptions of employees across gender (males and females) and categories (general, disabled, minorities, and social disadvantaged) towards workforce diversity in an Indian public sector organization, i.e., Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited. Based on a sample of 619 respondents, the results of data analysis indicated that gender and categorical discriminations were prevailing in the organization.*

**Keywords:** *Workforce Diversity, Perception, Public Sector, India*

## INTRODUCTION

Incontrovertibly, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed numerous diversity reforms worldwide. In developing countries, such as India, the idea of diversity has become more relevant owing to rocketed globalization, demographic shift in societies, and transition in labour markets (Kundu, 2003; Kundu et al., 2015). Public sector organizations are not exempted from this perspective (Choi & Rainey, 2010). Rather, due to equal employment opportunities (EEO) and affirmative actions (AA), they are considered more committed to workforce diversity than private organizations (Choi & Rainey, 2010; Hur & Strickland, 2012; Kundu & Mor, 2016). The initial reaction of government to diversity issues was through two approaches, that is, traditional liberal approach and traditional radical approach (Woodard & Saini, 2006). The former was discussed as the EEO, that is, aimed at eliminating discrimination and providing equal

access and opportunity to all. The latter was discussed as the AA, that is, aimed at positively discriminating in favour of the disadvantaged groups (Syed & Kramar, 2009).

However, all this has led to the emanation of number of allied alarming issues such as prejudices, stereotypes and perceptions of discrimination in Indian working environment. A burgeoning body of literature has witnessed, through subjective measures, that stereotypical outlook and discriminations concerning women, minorities, socially disadvantaged and disabled employees do exist in public sector organizations (Naff, 1994; Soni, 2000; Kundu, 2003; Cooke and Saini, 2010). This study is an extensive attempt to explore the differences in the perceptions of diverse employees towards workforce diversity through a study of a large Indian telecom public sector organization, that is, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).

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## PROFILE OF BHARAT SANCHAR NIGAM LIMITED (BSNL), INDIA

BSNL is an Indian state-owned telecommunications company headquartered in New Delhi. It was incorporated on 15 September 2000. It is one of the largest and leading public sector organizations providing a comprehensive range of telecom services in India. It had a customer base of 95.08 million as on 31 October 2016. It is also a member of various international submarine cable systems including Bharat Lanka Cable System, Millennium Cable System, SEMEWE4, and International MPLS-VPN. In 2011–2012, it had a net worth of Rs. 71,171 crore and revenue of around Rs. 27,933 crore. It has a vast reservoir of highly skilled, experienced and diverse workforce of about 357,000 employees (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, 2018).

## IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Indian telecom sector plays a significant role in the economic development of a country (Dhingra & Gakhar, 2014). According to the World Bank, a 10% increase in tele-density will boost GDP by 6% (Kaur & Malhotra, 2014). India is the world's second largest telecommunications market, with 915 million subscribers as of December 2013. With a market share of about 11%, BSNL is one of the major public sector players in the Indian telecom sector (Dhingra & Gakhar, 2014). Besides, it is argued that public sector organizations are guided by the principles of fairness, accountability, justice, equality and non-discrimination and, thus, they should support and promote diversity (Davis, Keuleers, Beavers, Richard, & Fezzardi, 2014). Considering the significance of telecommunication market towards India's growth and the pertinent significance of studying diversity in public sector, this paper will endeavour to investigate the differences in the perceptions of employees across gender (males and females) and categories (general, disabled, minorities and social disadvantaged) towards workforce diversity in Indian public sector through a study of an Indian telecommunication organization, that is, BSNL, India. Keeping in mind the aforementioned discussion, this study is an attempt to seek answers for the following questions:

- How do employees' perceptions across gender and categories differ on the 'promotion of diversity'?
- How do employees' perceptions across gender and categories differ on the issue of 'development opportunities for diverse workforce'?
- How do employees' perceptions across gender and categories differ on the issue of 'organizational support for diverse workforce'?

- How do employees' perceptions across gender and category differ on the 'ability and performance of diverse workforce'?

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

### Promotion of Diversity

The public sector organizations have been at the forefront of valuing diversity (McDougall, 1996; Soni, 2000; Hur & Strickland, 2012). However, the attitudes and perceptions of diverse employees about organization's efforts to promote diversity still largely remain unanswered in public sector (Soni, 2000; Kundu, 2003). Study found that men, women, minorities and people of colour perceived alike working environment in differing ways (Fine, Johnson, & Ryan, 1990). Females were more positive towards diversity than their male counterparts (Ebie & Djebarni, 2011; Veldsman, 2013). Studies of Kossek and Zonia (1993) and Soni (2000) in the US found that women and minority groups supported diversity more in comparison to white males. Groeneveld and Verbeek (2012) in a study of a Dutch public sector found that female and ethnic minority employees valued diversity management initiatives more as it would give equal opportunities to all groups in comparison to the native Dutchmen, who undermined the significance of organizational efforts to promote diversity. Harrisson and Thomas (2009) suggested that skin tone was ranked more highly than one's educational background and prior work experience. Kundu (2003), in a study of 1,083 employees in India, found that minority, socially disadvantaged and disabled employees perceived diversity as more valuable than general category employees. Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of 'promotion of diversity'.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of 'promotion of diversity'.

### Development Opportunities for Diverse Workforce

Employees may have different perceptions, regarding access to development opportunities in different categories. For example, Kundu (2004) established that female employees, as compared to males, positively perceived that their organization should work towards ensuring full access of development opportunities to women. Soni (2000) had similar findings, which stated that women and minority

employees had a perception of discrimination regarding the access to development opportunities, which might be due to the lack of mentoring programmes, feedback systems and informal social networks in the organization. In another study, Veldsman (2013) found that minority groups essentially needed development opportunities to rise into leadership positions, which could be facilitated to them through mentoring programs and apprenticeships by senior employees and management.

Further, employees of all categories (minority, disabled and socially disadvantaged employees), except general category, strongly believed that their respective categories should have had full access to development opportunities (Kundu, 2003, 2004). Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘development opportunities for diverse employees’.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘development opportunities for diverse employees’.

### **Organizational Support for Diverse Workforce**

Despite extensively prevailing AA and EEO laws (Sipe, Johnson, & Fisher, 2009; Veldsman, 2013), the principle of equal opportunities regarding salary, career advancement, promotion and working facilities was often violated (Kundu, 2003; Ngo et al., 2003). In addition, employees across various categories may have varying perceptions regarding the fairness and support provided by the organization (Veldsman, 2013) based on their personal experiences at the workplace (Soni, 2000). For instance, women perceived that they lagged behind men regarding salary, salary progressions and promotional avenues (Ngo et al., 2003). The equity gap between men and women is like a mirage. Although it appears to be closing, women encounter more discrimination at work than men regarding a glass ceiling (Fine et al., 1990; Soni, 2000; Sipe et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Ebie and Djebarni (2011) explored that white managers were more associated with negative attitudes towards equality and diversity in their organizations. In a case study of a UK local authority, Creegan, Colgan, Charlesworth, and Robinson (2003) found that minority employees ranked ‘career development for black and visible minority staff’ higher than white employees, who ranked it as least important practice. Further, the minority women observed that they faced more barriers and biases than white employees and their minority men counterparts (Soni,

2000; Creegan et al., 2003). Soni (2000) and Kundu (2003) found that general category males extensively perceived that diversity-management initiatives were designed to promote the welfare of women, minorities and socially disadvantaged. Sipe et al. (2009), in an interaction of race and gender, found that non-white university students were more likely to perceive that their gender would affect their pay as compared to white students.

Further, the reality of social diversity is even more complicated, as there may be a case where an employee fits into several potential social categories (Ospina, 2001). For example, a female may be a member of a minority group and may have a disability. Veldsman (2013) found that black women faced double-disadvantage of race and gender discrimination as they were employed at slightly lower levels than both white employees and black men. Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 3a:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for female workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for female workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3c:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for disabled workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3d:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for disabled workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3e:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3f:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3g:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for minority workforce’.

*Hypothesis 3h:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘organizational support for minority workforce’.

### **Ability and Performance of Diverse Employees**

Even though women had made their pace in the public sector, they continued to face various challenges while

climbing the management ladder regarding a glass ceiling (Bhatnagar, 1987; Naff, 1994; Sabharwal, 2013). A study of 177,586 US federal agency employees deduced that women were assessed as underprivileged by men in the leadership roles and, thus, often encountered various hitches even after breaking the glass ceiling (Sabharwal, 2013). Soni (2000) investigated that white females and minority females believed that they had to work harder in their organizations than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves. Bhatnagar (1987) and Kundu (2003) contended that women hold themselves to be more competent for managerial positions than men. Male employees, however, believed that they uniquely possessed the potential traits of an effective leader, that is, emotionally stable, aggressive, temperament, attitude, self-reliant, competitive, self-confident, objective, ambitious, well informed and forceful (Kundu, 2003; Sabharwal, 2013).

Further, the differences in personal, cultural and societal circumstances of disabled people also influence their skills development and productivity potential. For example, in countries where the attitude towards women was unfavourable, disabled women would face additional barriers, which would directly impact their ability and performance level (Powers, 2008). Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 4a:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance of socially disadvantaged employees’.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance of socially disadvantaged employees’.

*Hypothesis 4c:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance of female employees’.

*Hypothesis 4d:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance of female workforce’.

*Hypothesis 4e:* Male and female employees of BSNL differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance

of minority workforce’.

*Hypothesis 4f:* Employees of BSNL across categories differ significantly in their perceptions of ‘ability and performance of minority workforce’.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sample

To collect the data, a questionnaire was prepared and filled with the diverse employees of BSNL who underwent training at the BSNL training centres. BSNL has 15 training centres at different locations including Shimla, Rajpura, Jaipur, Lucknow, Jabalpur, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Bhopal, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Kolkata, Secundrabad, Trivandrum and Chennai. At each training centre, a batch of 50 to 75 BSNL employees belonging to diverse categories comes every week for training. All these 15 training centres were numbered individually on separate pieces of paper. These pieces of papers were folded and mixed into a bowl. Lastly, three centres were chosen randomly from the bowl by picking folded pieces of papers in a random manner. To put simply, the three training centres located at Rajpura, Ghaziabad and Jabalpur were chosen for the collection of data through lottery or fishbowl method (Punsalan & Uriarte, 1987). Around 300 (75 per week) questionnaires were distributed to each of the three training centres in a span of 1 month and, thus, leading to the circulation of 900 questionnaires. Out of the total distributed questionnaires, 750 questionnaires were gathered. After examining, 131 responses were eliminated because of the missing data. Finally, 619 fully filled-up questionnaires from three BSNL training centres were used for analysis. Respondents comprised of diverse categories of employees including males and females belonging to general category, minority (religious minorities), disabled (physically handicapped) and socially disadvantaged (Scheduled Castes [SCs], Scheduled Tribes [STs], and Other Backward Classes [OBCs]). The description of the total sample distributed over four diverse categories is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of Sample**

| General |        | Diverse Employees |          |                        | Total |     |
|---------|--------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-------|-----|
|         |        | Differently abled | Minority | Socially disadvantaged |       |     |
| Gender  | Male   | 216               | 30       | 51                     | 159   | 456 |
|         | Female | 55                | 19       | 28                     | 61    | 163 |
| Total   |        | 271               | 49       | 79                     | 220   | 619 |

Source: Primary data

## Workforce Diversity Measure

This measure was examined through a 29-item scale of workforce diversity status originally developed by Kossek and Zonia (1993) and further used by Kundu (2003). Out of these 29 variables, a total of seven items were related to valuing diversity, four were allied to development opportunities for diverse workforce, six variables were associated with the ability and performance of a diverse workforce, and the last 12 variables were used to measure the extent of organizational support for diverse workforce (see Table 2). The scale was operationalized using a five-point Likert-type scale. The scale anchors for valuing diversity and developmental opportunities ranged from strongly disagree (one) to strongly agree (five). The scale anchors for ability and performance of employees ranged from much lower (one) too much higher (five). Finally, for organizational support, a five-point scale ranging from least chance (one) to a very great chance (five) was employed.

## Statistical Techniques

The data were subjected to statistical techniques such as factor analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), means, and grand means. Cronbach's alpha was also ascertained.

## RESULTS

Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was employed to reduce the data by using SPSS 20 software. Factors with eigen values greater than one were retained (Kaiser, 1960). To state the factors more evidently, factor loadings greater than 0.50 were considered practically significant (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). However, with a sample size of minimum 150, factor loadings higher than 0.45 were also treated as significant for

analysis (Hair et al., 1995). Therefore, we retained items that had loadings greater than 0.450, and this had resulted in the deletion of two items with loadings below 0.40 including 'increased representation of socially disadvantaged workforce (promotion of diversity)' and 'working facilities for the socially disadvantaged workforce (organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce)'. The process resulted in the extraction of nine factors derived from 27 items namely, 'promotion of diversity' ( $\lambda = 6.768$ ; percentage of variance = 24.17%), 'organizational support for female workforce' ( $\lambda = 2.613$ ; percentage of variance = 9.33%), 'development opportunities for diverse workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.586$ ; percentage of variance = 5.66%), 'ability and performance of socially disadvantaged workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.483$ ; percentage of variance = 5.29%), 'organizational support for disabled workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.440$ ; percentage of variance = 5.14%), 'ability and performance of female workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.348$ ; percentage of variance = 4.813%), 'ability and performance of minority workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.234$ ; percentage of variance = 4.40%), 'organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.178$ ; percentage of variance = 4.20%), and 'organizational support for minority workforce' ( $\lambda = 1.015$ ; percentage of variance = 3.62%).

To check the internal consistency and reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha values were computed using SPSS Statistics. The Cronbach's alpha values for the nine factors were 0.715, 0.730, 0.705, 0.723, 0.769, 0.770, 0.654, 0.681 and 0.690; and for the full scale, it was found to be 0.875 (see Table 2). According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006), the lower limit of Cronbach alpha is 0.70. However, 0.60 is also acceptable, especially in exploratory studies conducted in the field of social sciences (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, all the nine factors had met the acceptable value of 0.6. Table 2 shows the factors, loadings for all variables, eigen values, the percentage of variance explained by each factor, and Cronbach's alpha values.

**Table 2: Factor Loadings of Varimax Rotated Principal Components Regarding Workforce Diversity**

| Factors   | Loadings | Eigen Value | Percent of Variance | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|----------|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| F1 (Promotion of diversity )                              |          | 6.768       | 24.170              | 0.715            |
| Hiring and retaining female workforce                     | 0.659    |             |                     |                  |
| Hiring and retaining minority workforce                   | 0.780    |             |                     |                  |
| Hiring and retaining differently abled workforce          | 0.550    |             |                     |                  |
| Increased representation of female workforce              | 0.477    |             |                     |                  |
| Increased representation of minority workforce            | 0.550    |             |                     |                  |
| F2 (Organizational support for female workforce)          |          | 2.613       | 9.332               | 0.730            |
| Working facilities for the female workforce               | 0.613    |             |                     |                  |
| Career and promotional opportunities for female workforce | 0.744    |             |                     |                  |
| The increment in salaries of the female workforce         | 0.743    |             |                     |                  |

| Factors   | Loadings | Eigen Value | Percent of Variance | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|----------|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Working facilities for minority workforce                                 | 0.563    |             |                     |                  |
| F3 (Development opportunities for a diverse workforce)                    |          | 1.586       | 5.665               | 0.705            |
| Opportunities for female workforce  | 0.636    |             |                     |                  |
| Opportunities for minority workforce                                      | 0.618    |             |                     |                  |
| Opportunities for socially disadvantaged workforce                        | 0.703    |             |                     |                  |
| Opportunities for differently abled workforce                             | 0.648    |             |                     |                  |
| F4 (Ability and performance of socially disadvantaged workforce)          |          | 1.483       | 5.296               | 0.723            |
| The ability of socially disadvantaged workforce                           | 0.637    |             |                     |                  |
| Performance of socially disadvantaged workforce                           | 0.738    |             |                     |                  |
| Hiring and retaining a socially disadvantaged workforce                   | 0.656    |             |                     |                  |
| F5 (Organizational support for differently abled workforce)               |          | 1.440       | 5.144               | 0.769            |
| Working facilities for the differently abled workforce                    | 0.802    |             |                     |                  |
| Career and promotional opportunities for differently abled workforce      | 0.856    |             |                     |                  |
| The increment in salaries for differently abled workforce                 | 0.570    |             |                     |                  |
| F6 (Ability and performance of female workforce)                          |          | 1.348       | 4.813               | 0.770            |
| The ability of female workforce   | 0.748    |             |                     |                  |
| Performance of female workforce   | 0.747    |             |                     |                  |
| F7 (Ability and performance of minority workforce)                        |          | 1.234       | 4.407               | 0.654            |
| The ability of minority workforce   | 0.780    |             |                     |                  |
| Performance of minority workforce   | 0.772    |             |                     |                  |
| F8 (Organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce)          |          | 1.178       | 4.207               | 0.681            |
| Career and promotional opportunities for socially disadvantaged workforce | 0.706    |             |                     |                  |
| The increment in salaries for socially disadvantaged workforce            | 0.752    |             |                     |                  |
| F9 (Organizational support for minority workforce)                        |          | 1.015       | 3.626               | 0.690            |
| Career and promotional opportunities for minority workforce               | 0.806    |             |                     |                  |
| The increment in salaries for minority workforce                          | 0.848    |             |                     |                  |
| Total scale   |          |             |                     | 0.875            |

Two-way ANOVA was employed to ascertain the significant differences in the perceptions of male and female employees of diverse categories regarding the nine extracted factors. Table 4 shows the results of two way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each factor, the corresponding significance levels of the main effects, that is, gender effect and category effect and the two-way interaction effect (i.e. gender  $\times$  category), where significant F values indicated the difference of perceptions between male and female and various categories of employees (i.e. general, minority, disabled and socially disadvantaged) and the impact of both independent variables on each other. Table 5 shows the means and grand means of the variables.

The following sections elucidate the ANOVA results according to the nine dimensions of workforce diversity.

### Promotion of Diversity

The result findings indicated that significant differences according to gender ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) and category ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) were observed for this factor. Specifically, males ( $\bar{x} = 3.21$ ) had relatively less favourable views regarding diversity efforts as compared to females ( $\bar{x} = 3.58$ ). As well, mean scores accentuated that general category ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ) employees were less favourable of valuable efforts taken by the organizations to promote diversity in comparison to a minority, disabled

and socially disadvantaged category employees ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.41$ , and  $\bar{x} = 3.39$ , respectively). Above and beyond, general category male ( $\bar{x} = 3.09$ ) employees were least favourable of diversity efforts. Thus, hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported.

### Organizational Support for Female Workforce

The present study highlighted significant differences according to category effect ( $p \leq 0.049$ ) and interaction effect (i.e. gender  $\times$  category;  $p \leq 0.032$ ) for perceptions regarding organizational support for females regarding equality in working facilities, career progression opportunities and salary hikes. General category ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ) employees rated the chances of women receiving organizational support least in comparison to all other categories, that is, socially disadvantaged, disabled and minority ( $\bar{x} = 3.47$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.49$ , and  $\bar{x} = 3.58$ , respectively). In respect to interaction effect, females from general category ( $\bar{x} = 3.36$ ) and socially disadvantaged category ( $\bar{x} = 3.43$ ) perceived less organizational support for females than males from general ( $\bar{x} = 3.47$ ) and socially disadvantaged category ( $\bar{x} = 3.49$ ). Hence, result findings verified hypothesis 3b and rejected hypothesis 3a.

### Development Opportunities for Diverse Workforce

This factor showed significant differences according to gender ( $p \leq 0.020$ ), category ( $p \leq 0.008$ ) and the interaction effect ( $p \leq 0.008$ ). Female employees ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ) valued and rated the significance of equality of development opportunities for a diverse workforce in organization higher than did males ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ). Specifically, females from a minority ( $\bar{x} = 3.86$ ) and socially disadvantaged ( $\bar{x} = 3.60$ ) category had the most favourable attitude towards such efforts. General category ( $\bar{x} = 3.36$ ) employees rated the vitality of developmental opportunities for diverse employees significantly lower than employees of disabled, minority and socially disadvantaged ( $\bar{x} = 3.49$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.51$  and  $\bar{x} = 3.50$ , respectively) categories. Accordingly, the results supported hypotheses 2a and 2b.

### Ability and Performance of Socially Disadvantaged

Gender effect ( $p \leq 0.026$ ) and category effect ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) differences were significant for this scale. Precisely, females ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ) rated socially disadvantaged employees more competent and productive than they were assessed by their male ( $\bar{x} = 3.24$ ) counterparts. Although, one exception was

observed in case of general category females ( $\bar{x} = 2.97$ ) who underscored the ability and performance of socially disadvantaged employees. Further, socially disadvantaged ( $\bar{x} = 3.53$ ) employees were of the view that they are more competent and productive than general ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ), disabled ( $\bar{x} = 3.16$ ) and minority ( $\bar{x} = 3.47$ ) employees. Thus, hypotheses 4a and 4b were supported by the results.

### Organizational Support for Disabled Workforce

All three effects, namely, gender ( $p \leq 0.070$ ), category ( $p \leq 0.055$ ) and interaction effect ( $p \leq 0.007$ ) showed significant differences for the variable 'organizational support for disabled workforce'. Males ( $\bar{x} = 3.39$ ) rated the vitality of providing organizational support to disabled employees lesser in comparison to female employees ( $\bar{x} = 3.46$ ). Disabled employees ( $\bar{x} = 3.33$ ) perceived the chances of receiving organizational support for themselves lower than that rated by general ( $\bar{x} = 3.38$ ), minority ( $\bar{x} = 3.53$ ) and socially disadvantaged ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) employees. Further, a perusal of the mean scores indicated that disabled male employees ( $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ) rated the organizational support received themselves as the lowest compared with that rated by other categories of employees irrespective of their gender. Therefore, hypothesis 3c and 3d were supported.

### Ability and Performance of Female Workforce

The perceptions regarding the ability and performance of female employees differed significantly according to gender effect ( $p \leq 0.000$ ). Females ( $\bar{x} = 3.44$ ) perceived that they surpass men regarding ability and performance ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ). However, no substantial differences were observed according to category and interaction effect on this variable. Thus, the results supported hypothesis 4c, but not hypothesis 4d.

### Ability and Performance of Minority Workforce

For the scale 'ability and performance of minority workforce', gender ( $p \leq 0.023$ ) and category ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) differences were significant. Females ( $\bar{x} = 3.35$ ) perceived minority workforce to be more competent compared with males ( $\bar{x} = 3.20$ ). Further, employees belonging to general, disabled and socially disadvantaged ( $\bar{x} = 3.13$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.16$  and  $\bar{x} = 3.30$ , respectively) categories rated the ability and performance of minority workforce much lesser than that rated by minority workforce ( $\bar{x} = 3.49$ ) themselves. Consequently, hypotheses 4e and 4f were supported.

**Table 3: Summary results of analysis of variance (ANOVA)**

| Variables  | Effects               |                         |                              |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|  | Gender (main) F-value | Category (main) F-value | Two-way interactions F-value |
| F1 Promotion of diversity                                      | 29.828<br>(0.000)     | 7.530<br>(0.000)        | 0.328<br>(0.805)             |
| F2 Organizational support for female workforce                 | 0.588<br>(0.444)      | 2.642<br>(0.049)        | 2.963<br>(0.032)             |
| F3 Development opportunities for diverse workforce             | 5.398<br>(0.020)      | 4.009<br>(0.008)        | 4.003<br>(0.008)             |
| F4 Ability and performance of socially disadvantaged workforce | 4.986<br>(0.026)      | 19.297<br>(0.000)       | 2.144<br>(0.094)             |
| F5 Organizational support for disabled workforce               | 3.294<br>(0.070)      | 2.548<br>(0.055)        | 4.037<br>(0.007)             |
| F6 Ability and performance of female workforce                 | 16.866<br>(0.000)     | 0.404<br>(0.751)        | 0.768<br>(0.512)             |
| F7 Ability and performance of minority workforce               | 5.190<br>(0.023)      | 6.297<br>(0.000)        | 1.112<br>(0.343)             |
| F8 Organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce | 2.561<br>(0.110)      | 4.035<br>(0.007)        | 1.464<br>(0.223)             |
| F9 Organizational support for minority workforce               | 3.999<br>(0.046)      | 1.004<br>(0.391)        | 8.043<br>(0.000)             |

Note: Significance levels are indicated in parenthesis

### Organizational Support for Socially Disadvantaged Workforce

A significant category effect ( $p \leq 0.007$ ) was observed on this variable. Particularly, disabled ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ) and minority ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) category employees tended to believe that socially disadvantaged employees had better chances of receiving organizational support. No differences were found on this variable according to gender and interaction effects. Therefore, hypothesis 3f was supported and hypothesis 3e was rejected.

### Organizational Support for Minority Workforce

Finally, the results indicated that gender effect ( $p \leq 0.046$ ) and interaction effect ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) were significant for the

scale 'organizational support for minority workforce'. Precisely, female employees ( $= 3.34$ ) were slightly more favourable for facilitating organizational support to minority employees regarding promotional avenues and salary hikes in comparison to male employees ( $= 3.30$ ). Males from general category, disabled and socially disadvantaged ( $= 3.31$ ,  $= 3.22$  and  $= 3.38$ , respectively) categories believed that minority workforce had better chances of receiving organizational support, whereas minority ( $= 3.07$ ) category males perceived that they had comparatively fewer chances of receiving organizational support. However, minority females ( $= 3.71$ ) perceived as they had better organizational support than others. Hence, the results provided support for hypothesis 3g and not for hypothesis 3h.

**Table 4: Summary of means and grand mean scores**

| Variables  | Categories of employees |         |          |          |                        |             |
|--|-------------------------|---------|----------|----------|------------------------|-------------|
|  |                         | General | Disabled | Minority | Socially disadvantaged | Grand means |
| F1 Promotion of diversity                                      | M                       | 3.09    | 3.23     | 3.43     | 3.29                   | 3.21        |
|  | F                       | 3.38    | 3.71     | 3.73     | 3.66                   | 3.58        |
|  | GM                      | 3.15    | 3.41     | 3.54     | 3.39                   |             |
| F2 Organizational support for female workforce                 | M                       | 3.47    | 3.48     | 3.47     | 3.49                   | 3.48        |
|  | F                       | 3.36    | 3.51     | 3.79     | 3.43                   | 3.48        |
|  | GM                      | 3.45    | 3.49     | 3.58     | 3.47                   |             |
| F3 Development opportunities for diverse workforce             | M                       | 3.36    | 3.51     | 3.32     | 3.47                   | 3.40        |
|  | F                       | 3.33    | 3.47     | 3.86     | 3.60                   | 3.54        |
|  | GM                      | 3.36    | 3.49     | 3.51     | 3.50                   |             |
| F4 Ability and performance of socially disadvantaged workforce | M                       | 3.07    | 3.03     | 3.37     | 3.47                   | 3.24        |
|  | F                       | 2.97    | 3.35     | 3.64     | 3.69                   | 3.40        |
|  | GM                      | 3.05    | 3.16     | 3.47     | 3.53                   |             |
| F5 Organizational support for disabled workforce               | M                       | 3.37    | 3.32     | 3.33     | 3.44                   | 3.39        |
|  | F                       | 3.39    | 3.33     | 3.88     | 3.38                   | 3.46        |
|  | GM                      | 3.38    | 3.33     | 3.53     | 3.42                   |             |
| F6 Ability and performance of female workforce                 | M                       | 3.16    | 2.93     | 3.08     | 3.21                   | 3.15        |
|  | F                       | 3.40    | 3.42     | 3.55     | 3.42                   | 3.44        |
|  | GM                      | 3.20    | 3.12     | 3.25     | 3.27                   |             |
| F7 Ability and performance of minority workforce               | M                       | 3.12    | 3.10     | 3.35     | 3.28                   | 3.20        |
|  | F                       | 3.17    | 3.26     | 3.73     | 3.35                   | 3.35        |
|  | GM                      | 3.13    | 3.16     | 3.49     | 3.30                   |             |
| F8 Organizational support for socially disadvantaged workforce | M                       | 3.35    | 3.70     | 3.37     | 3.41                   | 3.40        |
|  | F                       | 3.18    | 3.50     | 3.52     | 3.11                   | 3.28        |
|  | GM                      | 3.36    | 3.62     | 3.42     | 3.35                   |             |
| F9 Organizational support for minority workforce               | M                       | 3.31    | 3.22     | 3.07     | 3.38                   | 3.30        |
|  | F                       | 3.37    | 3.24     | 3.71     | 3.18                   | 3.34        |
|  | GM                      | 3.32    | 3.22     | 3.30     | 3.32                   |             |

Note: M = Male; F = Female; GM = Grand Mean

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was to examine the perceptions of employees across gender and categories regarding workforce diversity status in an Indian public sector organization, namely BSNL. Findings indicated that females valued the efforts of an organization to promote diversity and provide developmental opportunities to diverse workforce more than males. In line with this finding, Patrick

and Kumar (2012) observed that females recognized, accepted and valued diversity more as compared to their male counterparts in Indian organizations. Similarly, studies of Kundu (2003, 2004) stressed out that males see less value in diversity efforts compared with females. General category employees were the least supportive among the other categories of employees regarding the organization's efforts of promoting diversity and availing equal developmental opportunities. In contrast, employees of disabled, minority

and socially disadvantaged categories (irrespective of their gender) perceived that organization must take significant efforts in hiring and retaining a diverse workforce, increase their representation, and should continue working towards ensuring that developmental opportunities are fully accessible to them. Parallel to this finding, Kossek and Zonia (1993) and Soni (2000), which highlighted that women and racioethnic minorities see greater value in employer's diversity efforts compared with white men.

Disabled, minority and socially disadvantaged employees rated the amount of organizational support (working facilities, career advancement and promotional avenues, and salary increases) they received lesser than that rated by the other categories of employees, respectively. Inter-category discriminations regarding receiving organizational support had been predominantly cited in the Indian studies (Kundu, 2003, 2004; Sia & Bhardwaj, 2008; Vijaylakshmi et al., 2006). In other contexts also, studies had echoed similar findings pointing towards discriminations encountered by racial-ethnic minorities in organizational fairness and inclusiveness (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998; Mor Barak & Levin, 2002; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). For instance, Schmitt (2002) in a study reported that disadvantaged groups faced more severe discrimination in terms of pay, promotion and harassment than the members of privileged groups. Both males and females believed that females are receiving equal organizational support. Contradictorily, studies had shown that women believe that they received less favourable working conditions (Lyness & Thompson, 1997), career development opportunities (Sipe et al., 2009), decision-making power and powerful positions (Veldsman, 2013) as compared to men. This lack of evidence of discrepancies in the provision of organizational support is indeed surprising given the largely reported discriminations faced by women in Indian organizations (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005; Parikh & Sukhatme, 2004), together with an embedded history of protracted discriminations against women. This change was mirrored in a recent study of organized sector in India by Kaushik, Sharma and Kaushik (2014), which manifested that there were no gender discriminations evidenced in Indian organizations and that HR practices of Indian organizations were at par with the rest of the world. This positive change may be attributed to the heightened market competition, which has resulted in public-sector enterprises' restructuring their organizations and reconfiguring their business strategies (e.g., Khanna, 2007; Som, 2007).

The study also stressed that females perceived that they were more capable of showcasing better performance as compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Naff (1994) reported that women employees believed that their male counterparts considered them to be incompetent and inefficient until

proven otherwise and their viewpoints were mostly ignored at meetings. Similarly, Sia and Bhardwaj (2008) highlighted that other group employees and mostly male from majority group had feelings of inferiority towards female employees. Females also rated the ability and performance of minority and socially disadvantaged employees more than that rated by males. Socially disadvantaged employees rated their ability and performance greater than did employees of general, disabled, and minority category. Also, minority employees rated themselves more competent and productive than rated by other majority groups. These discrepancies in perceptions may be attributed to the stereotypes developed over time (Pettigrew & Martin 1987; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). This was substantiated through the findings of a study by Sia and Bhardwaj (2008) who explored that employees of dominant or majority group perceived that minority group employees tend to perform considerably due to AA policy, SC/ST reservations, and other legal and organizational privileges and not because of their competencies and abilities. Analogues to this, Greenhouse and Parsuraman (1993) found that the performances of black managers compared with other successful managers were attributed to substantial backings and assistances from others. Likewise, Soni (2000) in his study revealed that white males and white females believed that performance standards were generally lowered for minority males and females and thus, questioned the ability and performance level of minority employees.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

Findings from studies, such as the present one, can provide useful contributions for formulating policies and strategies in the public sector organization. Public sector organizations should make earnest and concentrated efforts to improve the prevailing stereotypes and perceptions of discrimination among diverse employees. This could be attained by communicating the intentions of fairness and equity to employees and diligently engaging them in diversity training and sensitization programs. Organizations should ensure equitable treatment of diverse employees regarding developmental opportunities and organizational support, as the perceptions of fairness and inclusiveness contribute in improving the organizational performance. As well, to harvest the true potentials of diversity initiatives, a new set of skills along with a significant shift in the attitudes of both employers and employees is required. Finally, a systematic and timely evaluation of diversity initiatives in the public sector organizations must be conducted to determine the effectiveness of diversity-management strategies (Soni, 2000).

Regardless of these pertinent contributions, the present study also contains some limitations and subsequently, suggests

future research directions. First, the study was based on a particular measurement tool, that is, questionnaire, which might lead to the possibility of common method variance in the findings. Thus, future empirical studies should refine the study by exploring the causal sequencing of this research model. Second, the study was based on BSNL only and, therefore, the racial and gender effects explored in the study may be the outcomes of several specific organizational characteristics. Comparative cross-industries and cross-cultural studies can be steered by the future researchers in order to fetch a comprehensive picture. Third, only gender and category were used as control variables, and thus, other variables such as age, experience, designation, etc., could be incorporated in the future researches. Fourth, this case study is in line with several other studies, which highlighted the prevailing discriminations and stereotypes against females, minorities, disabled and socially disadvantaged. Future researchers should attempt to understand the underlying reasons behind these stereotypes, which in turn, help them in devising effective diversity-management strategies (Soni, 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

Employer's efforts to promote diversity and work towards ensuring accessibility of development opportunities to diverse employees were valued more by female employees comparative to males, and valued least by general category employees compared with all other categories of employees. Disabled, minority and socially disadvantaged employees believed that they received lesser organizational support than that assumed by the other categories of employees respectively. Surprisingly, females and males, both, believed that females receive similar organizational support and are not discriminated against. Also, female employees rated the organizational support received by minority and disabled better than that rated by men. The ability and performance of female employees were rated less by males compared with that rated by females themselves. Minority and socially disadvantaged employees were considered less able and productive by general category employees. Although, females rated the ability and performance of minority and socially disadvantaged employees more than that rated by males. Socially disadvantaged employees rated their ability and performance greater than did employees of general, disabled and minority category. Also, minority employees rated themselves more competent and productive than rated by other majority groups. Each category of employees considered themselves to be more important than the others.

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