

Gender Stereotypes in Sri Lankan Legal Profession: The Company Secretarial Role

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Abstract: Phenomenon of corporate glass ceiling still exist in many companies across the globe and especially evident in Asian region including Sri Lanka. Comparative to other top management positions, board are predominated by men and recognized and acknowledged as a masculine arena. (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008). As a member of the board, role of company secretary is drastically changed overtime. Similarly, it has been claimed that company secretary is the longest serving member in a board comparative to directors. Due to orthodox patriarchal mindset, this critical and significant role in the modern companies is still an under researched domain (McNulty and Stewart, 2015; Hilb, 2011; Cadbury, 2002; Roberts, 2003; Muller, Lipp & Pluss, 2007, Erismann- Peyer, Steger & Salzmann, 2008). However, with the recent corporate and financial crisis, the role of company secretary regained its prominence as earlier. This study reflected on the research problem of whether modern company secretarial role is a gender stereotyped in Asian region especially in Sri Lanka? This is a qualitative exploratory and descriptive research. Findings of the study revealed that modern company secretaries plays an important role as central corporate governance professional in both private and public companies. Also, company secretarial role was transformed from simple administrative record

keeping to a top-notch corporate governance and leadership role. Further, this study provide evidence, how Sri Lankan company secretaries utilized this gender stereotyped role to scatters contemporary corporate glass ceiling and utilized it as a strategy to diffuse gender equality on contemporary patriarchal Sri Lankan society.

Keywords: company-secretary, women, worker, glass-ceiling, gender-stereotype

1. Introduction

The findings of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) study "Women at work trends 2015" revealed that global female labour force has decreased from 52.4 to 49.6 and the chances for women to participate in the labour market remains 27% lower than the those of men. (Ranaraja & Hassendeen, 2016). Further, it was found that despite the high literacy rate and educational achievements, Sri Lanka women participation in labour force is at a very low rate like 30-35 percent over the last two decades. ILO also emphasized that there is occupational segregation and concentration around the world and only 5 percent of women are employed in professional and technical occupations and only 2 percent in administrative and managerial positions. However, despite this low supply and demand for female labour in

general, there is a high demand for female labour for specific occupations like company secretaries in domestic corporate context. Lim (1996) defines occupational segregation as the “tendency for men and women to be employed in different occupations which includes both vertical and horizontal segregation.” Horizontal segregation is where women tend to be confined to specific occupations in comparison with men. Where, vertical segregation is women are concentrated at different levels within a specific occupation. The labour forces in most of the Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan including Sri Lanka evident occupational segregation (Chakraborty, 2013; Gunatilaka; 2013; Sutharshan, 2014). Even though women perform much better than men in professional category in Sri Lanka (Gunatilaka; 2013) clearly women are at disadvantage in breaking the corporate glass ceiling. Glass ceiling connotes artificial or invisible barriers that prevent women advancing certain level in corporate ladder (Reich, 1997). The Latin word “caelum” means heaven or sky. In 1986 the wording of “glass ceiling was first coined by a U.S Journalist in a Wall Street Journal article (Platt, DeVore, McIntyre & Simon, 2015; Holton & Dent, 2016). According to scholars, Sri Lankan working women face not only glass ceiling but also double jeopardy when it comes to climbing their career ladder, where capable and qualified women are not promoted and simultaneously companies not able to replace them (Wickremasinghe & Jayathilaka, 2006). In the said backdrop, modern company secretarial role in Sri Lanka is challenged not only with double jeopardy but also with both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation.

The word secretary means secrecy where the etymology derived from Latin word “secretarius” which connotes notary or scribe who write and keeps records of meetings.

Schlott (1989) claimed the history of this occupation able to trace back to its earlier predecessors beyond 5,000 years. In 1600-1833, the Board of East India Company as the first Joint Stock Company, had the need of a clerical officer called company secretary to keep their records (Seth, 2012). However, modern corporate secretarial role first appeared in United Kingdom in late 19th century and this was spread-out in common law countries by the first half of the 20th century and later rest of the developed countries (Laletina & Kosyakin, 2018). At the very inception, company secretary and the board of directors had the master/servant relationship. In 1902, Lord Macnaghten held that duties of company secretary is limited to somewhat humble character. Professional secretaries are distinguished by meeting the certification requirements set forth by various professional bodies in different jurisdictions, which include a rigorous exam and/or apprenticeship in order to license as registered corporate secretaries. In United Kingdom and other common wealth countries including Sri Lanka commonly refer this position as company secretary whereas in United States, Canada, Eastern European countries and Post-Soviet States etc. the same designation refer as corporate secretary. Similarly, board secretary is a more common norm to refer the same position. Normally, the designation of company secretary is treated as a senior position, form of a managerial or above rank in both private and public quoted companies around many jurisdictions.

It is imperative that company secretary to be well disciplined and ethical in his/her professional conduct. The chief aim of this occupation is corporate good governance and productivity enhancement of the corporate (Muigua, 2019) through primarily compliance with law and ethics of the land. Secondary, to adherence to internal management

procedures adopted by the employer. Hence, key responsibility of the company secretary is to ensure company and the board of directors complies with the legislations and regulations of the respective jurisdiction and they function within the four corners of the law. Moreover, company secretary is the formal company representative who can make representation on behalf of the company especially when it comes to corporate related legal documentations and proceedings. Similarly, company secretary is liable for defaults, commissions and omissions committed by company or by the board of directors. e.g. failure to file any changes in the details of the directors, secretary, shareholding and annual returns etc., Thus, company secretary plays a fundamental role in company life cycle from its inception to wind up. Also, public quoted listed companies in Sri Lanka it is mandate to appoint a registered company secretary in order to ensure the legal and regulatory compliance. Thus, domestic company legal framework utilize company secretary as an invisible mechanism for corporate good governance by placing an impartial internal regulatory officer inside the corporation.

2. Research Problem

However, despite there is a growth and demand for company secretarial function there is very less tendency for male legal professionals willing to join and establish a career as a company secretary in Sri Lanka. Further, in majority of the local boards, the sole female representation in board is made by the company secretary. Therefore, objectives of this study is to examine whether Sri Lankan board directorship and company secretarial positions are gender stereo typed roles. Hence, this study raises the questions; 1) whether there is a glass ceiling for women worker to join in the capacity of director? 2) does company secretary position in Sri Lanka is identified as a gender stereotyped role to be

filled by a women worker? 3) does this company secretarial role transformed from simple secretarial role to more influential governing and leadership role in modern corporates? 4) does this does company secretarial role utilized as a mechanism to shatter the corporate glass ceiling in modern corporations to reach higher positions in corporate governance? With that , this paper aims to examine and reflect how Asian patriarchal superiority and female inferiority in society embraced, transformed and embedded in to contemporary Sri Lankan corporates through occupational segregation and corporate glass ceiling. Further, how modern professional women workers scatter such glass ceilings and occupational segregations through transformation of such barriers to careers opportunities.

3. Methodology

Scholars claim that research should expose the hidden dynamics of the boards (Van der Walt & Ingley, 2003). Whereas, Pettigrew (1992) argues that board as open systems, researches relates to roles of board, composition, attributes of top managements should not be separated from research of powers in institutions and society. Or in other words corporations as units of society it also becomes expose to social dynamics and corporations becomes a reflective mirror of the society.

This research is a qualitative study mainly based on systematic literature review on both published and unpublished material during the time frame of 2000-2020. The study adopted a subjective approach to overcome the limitations on the confinement of company secretary role to its administrative and clerical attributes. Hence, study used a broad-minded lens of power (Pettigrew,1992) as such approach provides a better understanding, meaning and holistic approach to identify what attributes, competences and skills of a

company secretary enable to break the glass ceiling. Further, to examine how does modern women workers able to transform the orthodox secretarial role to governance and leadership role. Also, such lens helps to capture both formal and informal practices which influences the role of company secretary. This study emphasized and reflected on how power hierarchies and gender stereotypes in society subtly constructed and maintain within corporations and how glass ceiling was formed and ways to overcome such challenges in modern corporations.

4. Results & Discussion

A. Evolution of Company Secretarial Role

In 1887, Lord Esher, Master of the Rolls, claimed that “A secretary is a mere servant. His position is that he is to do what he is told and no person can assume that he has authority to represent anything at all, nor can anyone assume that statements made by him are necessarily accepted as trustworthy without further enquiry” (Tricker,2015). Whereas, by 1971, Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, held

“Times have changed. A company secretary is a much more important person nowadays than he was in 1887. He is an officer of the company with extensive duties and responsibilities. This appears not only in modern Companies Acts but also by the role, which he plays in the day-to-day business of companies. He is no longer merely a clerk. He regularly makes representations on behalf of the company and enters into contracts on its behalf... so much so that he may be regarded as (doing) such things on behalf of the company ...” (Tricker, 2015)

Further, according to The Cadbury Report (1992) “the company secretary has a key role to play in ensuring that board procedures are both followed and regularly reviewed. The chairman and the board will look to the company secretary for guidance on what their

responsibilities should be discharged. All directors should have access to the advice and services of the company secretary. Further, studies claim that chairman is entitled to the strong support of the company secretary in ensuring the effective functioning of the board (Tricker, 2015). In 2015, United Kingdom developed a model to highlight the multiple perspectives of company secretary as a; humble clerk, chair support, advocate for the collective conscience of the company, boundary spanner, honest broker and as a governance change agent (McNulty & Stewart, 2015). Due to the influential and potentially powerful role in the present corporate context, previously behind the scene administrative role of company secretary is now moving more and more in to spotlight and catching the eye of public. Also, Leathwaite (2018) executive summary stipulated that;

“Company secretaries are now vital to deliver sustainable business performance and are finding themselves increasingly in the limelight needing to deal with more sophisticated corporate governance and regulatory issues. In our experience the role is, and has been for some time, emerging from the shadows. Hence, company secretary is a critical part of an organization’s executive team and that the company secretary has the potential to act as a key pivot point between the business and the board.”

In Sri Lanka there are total of 109,810 companies. Where, 103,832 are private companies and 4,375 public quoted companies and 1,603 foreign companies as at 28.05.2021. Similarly, under present Companies Act No.07 Of 2007 Section 221 it is mandatory to have a company secretary for a company. Further, Section 221 provides the required qualification to be a company secretary .Further Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka provides another list of specific directions where a company

secretary of a listed company required to be adhered to. Thus, earlier mere clerical secretarial role is now formed to a legislatively acknowledged licensed occupation in Sri Lanka.

B. Gender Stereotyped Role of Company Secretary

The underestimation of women as less capable and talented to lead held by a social group refer as gender stereotype. Therefore, it does correspond to the reality (Martin, 2008). Moreover, according to gender stereotype, the characteristics of women does not feature to be a leader (Klenke.1996; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011). Broadly gender related behaviour in organizations can be categorized in to three main areas as; biological, social and cultural/structural (Bartol, Martin & Kromkowski, 2003; Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy, 2000; Powell & Graves 2003). However, research on gender and management is either marginalized or polarized (Rees, 2003) Thus, there are critical gaps in existing knowledge such as how gender perception and preference applicable and function (Malhotra & De Graff, 1997;2000) in corporate world including Sri Lanka (Gunatilaka,2016).

The structural artefacts such as the type of legislation the organization incorporated, constitution of the organization, primary purpose of the organization e.g. profit or non-profit, private, public or listed, concentration of shareholders and members the number of executive and non-executive directors will create the built-environment where the organization and board operates which forms a unique setting not only for organization and board (Robertson.2018) but also for a company secretary. Similarly, company secretaries fall under the definition of 'officer' of a corporation. Also, company secretaries are subject to many of the same duties and

obligations as directors.. The company secretary comes to act as 'the grout' to fill the knowledge cracks that might otherwise appear during a board meeting (Handicott, 2002). The Australian Courts have recognized the pivotal role of company secretary and held "the expression 'company secretary' is not a term of art. The responsibilities of company secretaries varies from company to company, within company, and overtime. They have tended gradually to wax over many decades... Despite, the growing role and obligations of role of company secretary and existing glass ceiling to become a director of the board as follows;

"Shareholders had been asking, 'when are you going to have a woman?' So they out a woman on just to say they had a woman. She had to break down brick walls to be heard. She had to work hard to get in to the conversation, almost like not being there. Management was not interested in her competency. It was old boy's club. And no one on the board wanted a female. - Male CEO (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008).However, the position of company secretary is dedicated for women workers.

C. Problems of Gender Stereotyped Company Secretarial Role

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) claim there is only 10 percent of women representation in managerial positions and less than 4 percent in upper most ranks of Fortune 500 companies. Similarly, there is only 21 percent of women workers in managerial positions globally (Strank & Dyrchs, 2012). Moreover, prior studies already affirmed that women workers face obstacles on climbing the career ladder and they were prevented from entering to managerial positions (Elmuti, Jin, 2009).Thus, women workers in higher levels of business are still rare by resulting a significant gender gap specially in upper most ranks. There is

only 22 percent of women representation in boards and 25 percent in the managerial positions in Sri Lanka (Uduwella & Jayatilaka, 2018; Grant Thornton, 2018). Also, previous study found that Sri Lankan women have higher cognitive skills than men and also they possess non-cognitive skills similar to men but they are getting paid less comparative to men of same status (Gunewardena, 2015).

Despite the remuneration gaps and issues of rankings, company secretary is duty bound to disclose any information that is related to illegal committed or practiced or likely to be committed or practiced by company, directors, shareholders or employees to deter any form of wrong doing by the company or its stakeholders. Therefore, this occupation requires company secretary to be impartial in her all dealings without any fear or favours with all stakeholders. Hence, this role demands to be knowledgeable and updated with necessary laws and regulations to act the same.

“I was the only woman in a room of guys. I’m not shy, but trying to get your voice heard around the table is not easy. You can make a point that is valid. Two minutes later ‘Joe’ says exactly the same thing, and all the guys congratulate him. It is hard, even at our level, to get your voice heard, You have to find a way to wedge in, and they realize you are not going away -Woman Director” (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008)

In the domestic context not only company secretary is gender stereotyped but also directors. While company secretarial position is stereotyped as feminine the position of director is stereotyped as a masculine. However, in a public quoted company, the position of company secretary is legally acknowledged as the key advisor to the board and management on corporate governance issues while same was treated as main contact point of shareholders and external agencies.

Therefore, due to this legislative enforcement company secretaries have gained formal recognitions in boards. Similarly because of legal knowledge and authority vest in them, they were able to acquire certain control over the board.

Simultaneously, company secretary should be either directly responsible to the board or should be accountable through chairman to the board for her core duties. If the company secretary is assigned other non-core duties or playing a dual or combined roles as a company secretary and as a member of the management team e.g. legal head might require to follow dual reporting lines for chairman as well as Chief Executive Officer. Hence, both company secretary and board should ensure there is no conflict nor compromise in performing both positions. E.g. company secretary also performed the role of corporate counsel time to time she need to take side of each role. In such circumstances, she may comply with the law than concerning the best interest for the company in long run. This would be inconsistent with the central governance role as a company secretary and hamper impartiality and un-biasness in advising the board in corporate governance issues. On the other hand, such double hatting would prevent whistleblowing role of corporate unethical and bad governance practices due to being a member of the management team.

Further, company secretary should bind the other board roles as a unified body while seek to maintain the consensus among the members of the board to protect the interest of the company. This task becomes critical and challenging when there is power asymmetries and destructive behaviours are presence in the board (Ladkin, 2013; Collinson, 2012; Briskin, 2011; Schyns & Hansbroughn, 2010; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). Therefore, company secretarial duties are essential ingredients in

implementation of sound corporate governance procedures (Maltas, 2002)

“They look at you sceptically as to how you got there. First, you’d better show men why you’re there. Women don’t get the benefit of the doubt. Board meetings are pretty brutal.” (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008)

Some companies opt to outsource the company secretarial role and to obtain the service of a freelance company secretary or from a company secretarial firm than having an in house permanent company secretary primarily due to cost cutting purposes and to maintain corporate secrets. Also, if the company secretary to implement the corporate governance framework throughout the organization, company secretary should know the business, not just the governance of business and also must know the board, not just the business of the board (Robertson, 2018). At the same time, company secretary can reduce the number of cognitive biases that play in board decision making process as opposed to taking advantage from them or allowing others to take advantages from them (Robertson,2018,p.39). Hence, the role of a company secretary encompasses several pressures such as authority pressure, time pressure, peer pressure and role pressure (Robertson, 2018). Also, modern gender stereotyped company secretarial role encounter many challenges.

D. Prospects of Gender Stereotyped Company Secretarial Role

Due to the high dynamics and growing complexities in companies the company secretarial role was took the second transition from Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to Chief Governance Officer (CGO) role. As a CAO company secretary role is to meet the minimum legal requirement. Whereas, CGO company secretary is one of the key governance officer and whose skills, expertise

and knowledge of the organization are harnessed for the benefit of the board and the organization. (Robertson, 2018).

“When we speak to company secretaries, and from our survey, we find that there has been significant changes to the role over the years. Eighty percent said that their role had increased somewhat or significantly in the time they had been in it. (Increased significantly: 46%; somewhat significantly: 34%) Many also stated that the role had increased due to greater pressure from the regulator” (Thornton, 2018)

Also, in the eyes of many directors company secretary position represents a shield against non-compliance and breaches of the company law. Thus, company secretary should be fully conversant with the company law and regulations which is crucial for corporate good governance (Lang, 1998). Hence, company secretarial role is expanded vertically by scattering the glass ceiling as well as horizontally by attracting multi perspectives like management, legal, audit and control etc. The recent hikes in the corporate meltdowns in world over, indicated the essence to have an effective corporate governance structure whether the corporate is private or public. In this juncture, many boards look up to the company secretary for guidance to implement such structures to overcome malpractices and mitigate corporate corruptions and frauds. As per previous findings in many instances the company secretarial role seems as either silent in the corporate scandals whilst in other instances, the company secretary is held liable especially when there is evidence that she executed some critical documents that gave the leeway to such corruption or fraud (Wanjiku, 2012).Also, company secretary has to build relationships because it’s ultimately an influential role (McNulty & Stewart, 2015). Therefore, company secretarial role varies on broad spectrum from simply CAO to CGO role

(Robertson, 2018). Merriam- Webster define influence as “the power to change or affect someone or something” either positively or negatively. In the corporate governance context, influence can be seen as changing a person’s currently held opinion to another in order to get what you expect. Thus, in any organization, leaders and managers are inherently engaged in a business of influence. Hence, company secretary also required to function under different momentums of direct and indirect influence in terms of the stakeholders on their influence roster (Robertson, 2018). The contemporary role of company secretary has enriched with authority and power. Similarly, the role has expanded both vertically and horizontally by entailing many legal obligations. Thus, these new warrant prospects need to handle with much care to avoid greater danger for both company and company secretary.

5. Findings and Recommendations

Even though, Company Secretary is appointed by the board, thereafter she will commence to govern the board and company. Governance is more than just complying on codes, laws, regulations and standards. It is about creation and inculcation of cultures of good practices in organizations (International Finance Corporation, 2016). Similarly, corporate governance issues are not haphazard but arise from a determinable path (Jones & Pollitt, 2003). Therefore, corporate secretary plays a key role in guaranteeing that board and company are complied with the statutory legal frameworks and internal regulatory framework. According to Companies Act No.07 of 2007 Sri Lanka company secretary has a responsibility for company’s compliance with the Companies Act where such responsibility becomes much higher for a listed company where it demands compliance not only with the Companies Act but also to adhere as per

Listing Rules of capital market requirements. Interpersonal relational power of the company secretary becomes politically critical in a crisis or major change in corporate (Van Essen, Engelen, & Carney, 2013). Thus, corporate secretary provides high level of corporate governance with actions relates to minimizing agency conflicts, adherence to corporate due procedures and initiating management best practices with the corporate. (Laletina, & Kosyakin, 2018). Thus, across the borders modern company secretary’s role as a corporate governance professional embraced multiple roles such as auditor, complier, controller, risk monitor, whistleblower, regulator and act as a central board processor, building block or genesis (Finkelstein and Mooney,2003).

Similarly, company secretary is the advisor and executor of internal corporate governance while act as the interface and arbitrator between internal and external governance elements (Dixit & Arun (2013). Hence, this role calls for thorough knowledge of the business environment which company function and expertise on rules, regulations, standards and laws where applicable. A recent study carried in United Kingdom found that company secretaries should be ‘commercially mind’ to carry out their role effectively (The All Party Parliamentary Corporate Governance Group ,2012) Therefore, 3rd Benchmarking Study conducted by Chartered Secretaries Australia claimed that company secretary had evolved to the level of Chief Governance Officer.(Benchmarking Governance Practices in Australia ,2005) Hence, modern company secretarial role was identified in the capacity of a ‘Key Management Personnel’ (Kapoor,2013) or ‘Director’ (International Finance Corporation, 2016). Whereas, modern company secretary act as the main catalyst of corporate governance. Therefore, company secretarial role shifted from its inception

clerical role to compliance role and in the third phase to managerial and governance role. Therefore, modern company secretarial role transformed the previous master/servant relationship to a more independent and accountable hybrid corporate and legal relationship while act as the 'conscience of the company'. Thus, inclusion of minimum gender balance ratio for both male and female for composition of board as regulations and enforcement of such ratio through internal and external audit standards becomes necessary. Simialrly, awareness on actual company secretarial role within the legal profession will support to change the present gender stereo type relevant to company secretarial role,

The court drawn attention to the concept of collective conscience role of the company secretary. Thus, under the concept of collective conscience role of company secretary she should strive not only for appearance of legal and regulatory compliance but should strive for actual legal and regulatory compliance. To achieve the same, company secretary should perform a cultural broker role by forming a piping system, where critical information flows through and around actors and relationships. Hence, company secretaries recognized as steward or guardian for the whole organization rather than a single organizational process. Therefore, cultural broker function of a company secretary able to inculcate and flourish the desired culture within the organization.

However, when company secretary wears double hats as a servant to the board in one capacity and as a peer of the board in another capacity it will form many challenges and complexities within the organizations. Nevertheless, these double hats roles are not new to this role where in 1581 English Levant Company Secretary performed the commanding actions in Her Majesties Name

(Epstein, 1908) and by 1600 Secretary of East India Company, became the Secretary of the State with the powers to execute the sovereign rights (Kaye, 1853; Ramaswami, 1983).Hence, at that time secretarial role was coupled with both affairs of the Company and the State. Similarly, company secretary of the Dutch East India Company in 1602 performed modern dual roles of company secretary as the secretary to the board as well as the adviser or advocate to the board (Schmidt, 1988; Gepken-Jager, 2005) When these companies collapsed, the wider powers vest with the company secretarial role got drastically narrowed and limited only to affairs of the company. Conversely, with recent past corporate collapses demanded to expand the role and duties of company secretary with corporate governance responsibilities (Murphy, 2003; Monks & Minow, 2004; Daigneault, 2004). With effect of that, company secretary was offered more effective tempered leadership with more visible power (Roberts, 2008) Hence, upon the review of literature it is evident that role of company secretary is in the cycle of regaining its historical double hatted powerful governing role in the contemporary context.

Once Sir Harvey Jones Former CEO of the British Company ICI said "A company secretary should have considerable personal integrity and be seen to stand for probity and right within the company. The secretary should be seen to 'side with the angels" and be prepared to state when the occasion demands that 'I fear that while what we are doing is within the letter of the law we are not within the spirit.' They have to be trusted by everyone. It is a bloody tough job." (Tricker, 2015). According to the above analysis it is evident that modern company secretary is vested with wide powers and lot of duties and responsibilities. Thus, company secretary is a professional vital for smooth operation of a modern companies.

Companies are expanding beyond boarders and company secretary's role also got expanded parallel as a central internal corporate governance official who manage and control the network of directors, shareholders, employees and company as well as the primary accountable officer for external legal and regulatory bodies. "The company secretary profession as a whole needs to evolve and develop into a more strategic and commercial offering. We need to stop being seen as administrative cost centres but rather as commercial board advisors and enablers, not barriers, to the business"(Leathwaite 2018).

Despite the changes taken place overtime and the significant role and contribution made by the company secretary to a board, still this position has a low profile in the board room (Arnold, 1987). Hence, this low profile role preferred to be occupied by a women worker rather than by a male worker. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out behavioural studies on power capabilities of company secretary (Cyert & March, 1963; Huse, 2005) to identify whether there is any gaps between the genders. Further to examine the power difference among the directors and company secretary in order to justify present gender stereotyping of the role of company secretary.

6. Conclusion

The study findings revealed that glass ceiling still significantly prevails in modern Sri Lankan companies especially at the top levels. Similarly, company secretary position is socially constructed as a feminine occupation and therefore it is gender stereotyped for women workers. Also, modern Sri Lankan company secretary role is an occupation where there is striking occupational and gender segregation. However, fragment of women workers in the said occupation exhibit the application of their leadership skills to transform the said position from mere

administrative role to a more effective governing and advisory role by scattering the glass ceiling. Thus, occupation of Company Secretary was redefined and reconstructed to a corporate position equivalent to a key managerial and leadership role in contemporary Sri Lanka.

This research study provided a novel illustration how organizational limitations able to transform as opportunities by thinking differently and adopting innovative approaches to old age corporate issues with the example of how glass ceiling was broken by the modern company secretaries by wearing double or multiple hats and shouldering burdens of organizations silently. Further, findings of this study reflect how women workers able to strategically transformed patriarchal dominance at apex of company which is a unit of building block of broader society. Thus, how scattering of glass ceilings in companies act as a change agent to diffuse gender equality in society.

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