

BOARD-TO-TEARS !!

{Shrewd leveraging of tears as a weapon for the professional working woman .. or a helpless expression of intrinsic emotional vulnerability by the gentler sex? MONOJIT LAHIRI explores this delicate terrain.}

In the twin-callings that I have been engaged in over three decades – Advertising and Journalism – there has always been a fair representation of women [hence my choice of these cool lines of work, anyway!] and the number seems to be growing at super speed. Without going into the dreaded glass-ceiling and gender-divide factor [both of which exist in rampant fashion despite all those sexy cover-stories in Sunday Supplements, weeklies, fortnightlies & monthlies and glamorous, hi-profile dramatic TV chat-shows beamed across the top English-language channels] this piece attempts to focus on another interesting area ... women crying at the work place! Is it good or bad? Is it perceived as a professional weakness that has no place in the professional world ... or is it viewed as a human failing, a spontaneous – albeit vulnerable – form of self-expression of a gender when stressed out that shouldn't ever be [unfairly] equated with their basic core competence? The Jury is clearly not out since there are differing voices.



Writer **Anne Kreamer** fires the first salvo when she contends that **“women have distinctly female parts – their essential femininity, their nurturing impulses and aspects of their intrinsic emotional biology, such as crying. These are not socially conditioned but neurobiologically hard-wired.”**

Career coach & author of *The Wall Street Professionals Survival Guide* Roy Cohen begs to differ and is convinced that **“one's emotional architecture and early**

socialization produces tears”. Since tears are often equated with vulnerability, it poses a huge stumbling block in the leadership stakes where these cry-babies are concerned, he adds. With times, while these outpourings may be “more acceptable” its never a good idea to go waaaaa at work! Others agree, emphasizing that more than a female act, it is seen as a thoroughly unprofessional gesture causing great discomfort to one and all. Some ladies readily confess that they'd rather drop an “F bomb” than cry because its awkward, embarrassing and unacceptable in the workplace. Crying, they continue, performs no function but rather serves as a distraction and takes away from productive behaviours. It achieves nothing, only stirring up a kind of drama in the office for which no serious, committed, focused [audience?] practitioner has either patience or time. If at all its got to be done, do it in private – washroom, car, outside in the garden/park/car park – get it over and with and return rejuvenated!

Leading the Yea for tears brigade is **Facebook coo Sheryl Sandberg** who, on the contrary, believes its perfectly cool for women to cry at work and she attributes her tears to be part of her success! **“Sure, I've**

cried at work. I've told people I've cried at work. I try to be myself. I talk about my hopes & fears and ask people about theirs. I am honest and transparent about my strengths & weaknesses and I encourage others to do the same”.

Powering this thinking are recent studies that indicate that tears don't seem to have the same career stigma or suicidal implications of yore and sometimes is even viewed as a positive emotion and asset. However, it comes with a cautionary note: there must be a distinctive chasm between authentic tears and manipulative waterworks!



The India story is not very different. While crying is a natural response to emotions and individuals who cry at the workplace are often seen as passionate people, the problem of coping with it remains paramount. **“Agreed, we in India are a more emotional lot than our western counterparts but in today's nano-second, globalised workspace, it can send out the wrong signals about the person's ability to deal with stress, pressure, inter-personal relationships and all work-related issues”**, says an HR heavyweight. Others believe it can create an invincible barrier in communication, making colleagues wary of interacting with the Drama Queen! However, renowned business author [We are like that only] & Management expert Rama Bijapurkar totally dismisses the entire lot of arguments that demean, ridicule, mock or pass sanctimonious judgement and brings her own uniquely perceptive spin to the table. **“Why should we ask women to bury their in-built sensitivity at work ... and how can they ever hope to do it? Isn't it more productive to teach men to accept women's emotions more compassionately and positively?”**

While she knows that the youngistan frequently label tears as “God, how unprofessional!” she keeps reminding these hard-nosed professional female [with business suits & clicking heels] that how come women appear to be so totally tolerant and okay with senior corporate men who scream, shout, slam their fists & papers on the table, curse, use unparliamentary language and storm off? par for the course? Why is it that when a woman cries, the whole atmosphere gets gendered? Bijapurkar believes that expressing emotions comes with the way we are and its grossly unfair to blackball it and chuck it in the trash can. It makes much more sense to fuse passion with compassion, head with heart and end up giving this materialistic, bottom-line-driven, profit-centric commercial world, a tiny [but transformational] piece of humanity.