

The Glass Ceiling – An Impact on Female Workforce

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ABSTRACT

Women in the field of working arena have witnessed a lot of progress, yet they remain underrepresented and below par in the upper rung of the organizational positions. This thwarts their capability to be an incumbent of the higher income category in the earnings distribution of an organization. This is a concept commonly referred to as the "Glass Ceiling." The prevalence of gender differences in the psychological attributes of women has become a major cause of inconsonance between the potential of women in terms of work efficiency and the emoluments they receive respectively. Glass Ceiling is one of the most compelling metaphors used to analyze the inequalities between men and women at a workplace. The present study lays emphasis on the pertinence of these gender differences in the psychological traits of women in the field of work environment. The paper also highlights the possible countervailing forces (both at work and at home) that may explain why work-family considerations are important to the phenomenon of glass ceiling. Falling under the category of gender discrimination, Glass Ceiling is a practice meted out to the women folk in the economic arena, which acts as a barricade to give women their due credit in the upper echelons of an organizational hierarchy. The present paper will try to make a precise effort to explain the phenomenon of glass ceiling as an instrument of gender discrimination, and its influence on the female workforce.

1. Introduction

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that sexism has prevented many talented women from achieving their full potential. Women in the field of working arena have witnessed a lot of progress, yet they remain underrepresented in the senior managerial positions. This concept which is an impediment in the career of high-achieving women is popularly referred to as "the glass ceiling". It is an invisible barrier that keeps women from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy of an organization". According to Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990, glass ceiling is "a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy". The "glass ceiling" is one of the most compelling metaphors for analyzing inequalities between men and women in the workplace. 'In a world where talent is distributed equally among women and men, an economy that does not fully tap into the leadership skills offered by women is necessarily inefficient,' says Chicago Booth Professor Marianne Bertrand.

The expression of "glass ceiling" is used widely in the media, newspapers, official government reports and other different academic platforms. This term refers to mean 'the unseen, yet unacknowledged barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rung of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements'. The term suggests that although it may now be the case that women are able to get through the front door of managerial hierarchies, at some point they hit an invisible barrier that blocks any further upward movement. Men constitute the majority of positions among managers, top executives, and higher levels of professional

workers whilst women are still concentrated in the lower categories of managerial positions. Glass ceiling effect is a pervasive resistance to the efforts of women to reach the top ranks of the organizational positions. Women represent over 40 per cent of the global labor force, of which, approximately 70 per cent of women are from developed countries and, 60 per cent from developing countries. Glass ceiling remains intractable and is a drag on the economy. Gender differences in psychological attributes of women in the field of work environment makes them susceptible to lower earnings in comparison to men. Women face a lot of challenges while striving to strike a balance between workplace and home responsibilities. In fact, childcare is one of the most prominent factors holding back women's earnings at the executive level. Bertrand's research has also found that when wives earn more than their husbands do, it is difficult on the relationship, and the marriage is more likely to be unhappy and plagued with adjustment problems.

2. Review of literature

Glass Ceiling as a phenomenon leading to gender discrimination occupies a significant place in available literature on the subject. Leadership style adopted and practiced by people, and gender is a much debated topic in the literature of glass ceiling.

Powell and Graves (2003) conducted a study to indicate that percentage of women in the managerial ranks and positions has increased in almost all countries. But irrespective of this rise, most of the women working at managerial levels find it hard to make an upward

progression to the top most managerial positions. They are confronted with the corrosive phenomenon of 'Glass ceiling' being practiced by the organizations to hinder the growth of female personnel. It can be noted that the proportion of women in lower and middle level management positions has increased significantly, while the proportion of women reaching the top management positions or climbing up the corporate ladder has remained relatively small (ILO, 2002). The ILO's *Global Employment Trends* (2003) reported that women continue to have lower labor market participation rates, higher unemployment rates and significant pay differences compared to men.

"Cultural biases, gender stereotypes, and attitudes against women, coupled with their not being viewed as primary income-earners, are the major obstacles to women's advancement".

Simpson and Altman (2003) describes glass ceiling as 'a well enshrined phenomenon supported by conclusive evidence'. Several empirical studies have been conducted to establish the presence of the practice of 'glass ceiling' in organizations worldwide which act as an instrument of gender discrimination. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) defined the concept of glass ceiling as "artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities". However, discrimination against women in the workplace has influenced their advancement in jobs that accord higher societal recognition and status in the male community. This discrimination acts as an instrument of exploitation which puts adverse and repressive effect on the female employees. Prejudices, glass ceiling effect or gender diversity are such barriers which are unseen and yet cast a negative spell on the working women. Thus the organizations that make plans to retain competent female employees ultimately end in a fiasco (Nandy, Bhaskar & Ghosh, 2014).

(Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Alimo-Metcalfe, B. 2004; Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson, 2013) found whether the different words represent gender or differ in understanding is not clear from the literature. Glass ceiling effect is instigated by the issues of gender differentiation and gender stereotyping which affect women on a continuum. (Nandy, Bhaskar & Ghosh, 2014) in their study observed that leadership demographics are skewed towards male leadership in comparison to female leaders. Traditionally, when the word 'leader' is used, an individual in common segment imagines a masculine image of a leader. Even female leaders are passively tuned to perceive the same. Snaebjornsson, and Edvardsson, (2013) stated that women are more convinced than men that a successful manager is a "male".

3. Aims of the Research

The practice of 'glass ceiling' has a colossal destructive and corrosive impact on the psyche of female species. The present paper makes an attempt to comprehend the concept of 'glass ceiling' and how this practice has evolved into an instrument of gross gender discrimination against women vis a vis their male counterparts. Another aim of the paper is to cite out the reasons for gender discrimination. This paper, in the conclusion, will highlight some suggestions recommendations to break the phenomenon of 'glass ceiling' and facilitate the progress and advancement of women at workplace, which follows the principle of equity and parity between work and reward.

4. Research Objectives

1. To examine the concept of 'Glass Ceiling' as followed in different forms in organizations.
2. To understand the causes of gender discrimination as per the phenomenon of 'glass ceiling'.
3. To analyze how gender discrimination exhibited in the form of glass ceiling has a profound impact on the female workforce.
4. To suggest methods to break through the glass ceiling and create a professionally conducive atmosphere for the growth and welfare of women workforce.

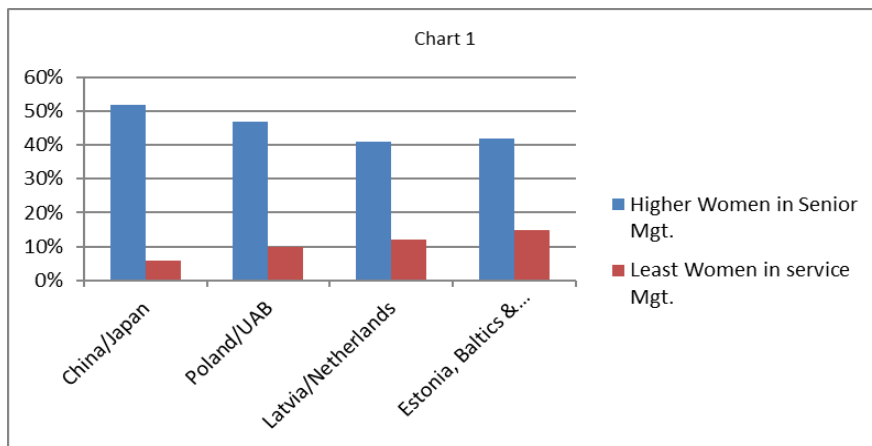
5. Research Methodology

Research Methodology serves as the backbone of any form of research. The present paper has been developed on the basis of secondary literature available on the topic of "Glass Ceiling". The paper has taken into consideration findings from various authors, journals, research papers, reports, websites, and other sources to draw information and inferences on the subject.

6. Global Findings on Glass Ceiling

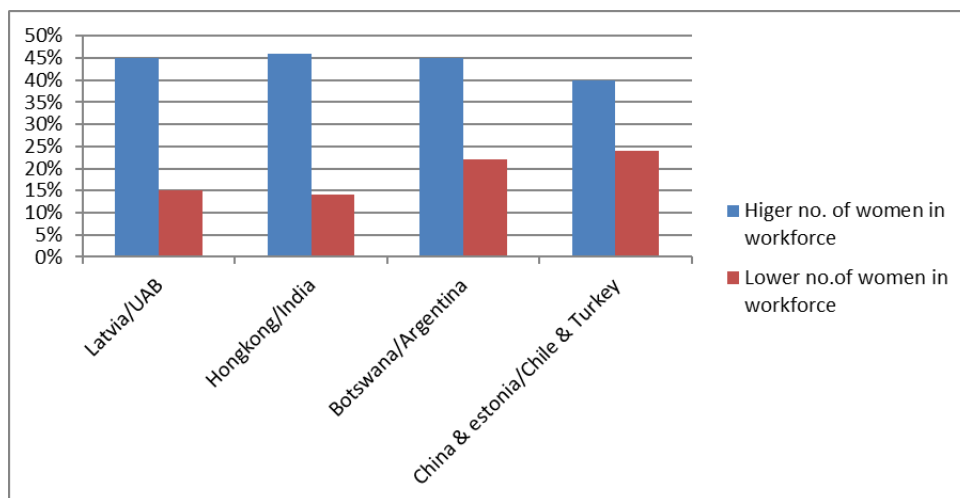
Glass ceiling is a phenomenon rampant in every country. However, the practice finds presence to a much larger extent in the developing countries. The figures mentioned below present certain statistics on the present day scenario on the status of female managers across the globe.

- Mainland China (52%), Poland (47%), Latvia (41%), Estonia, Baltics and Lithuania (42% each) lead in terms of businesses having women in senior management. Those with the lowest numbers of women are Japan (6%), UAB (10%), Netherlands (12%), Switzerland (15%) and Argentina (16%)



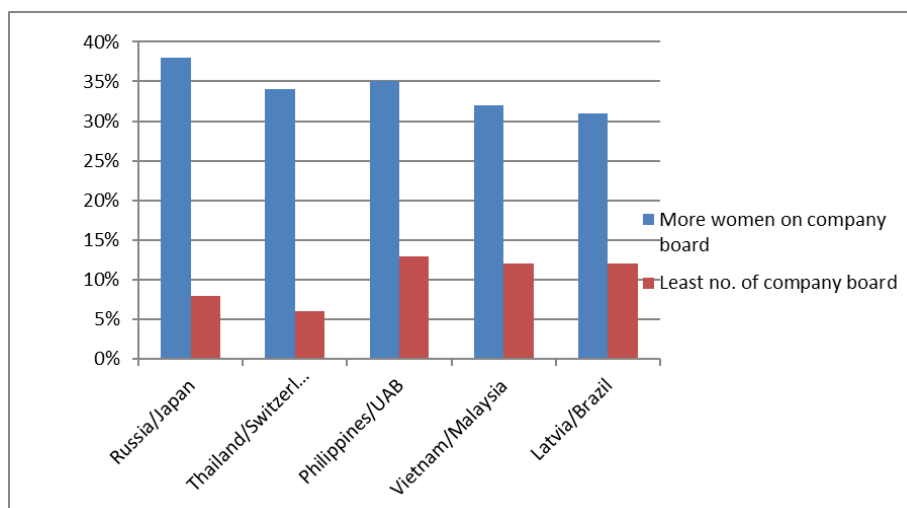
- Globally, women make up (36%) of the workforce. Leaders are Latvia (45%), Hong Kong (46%), Botswana (45%), Mainland China and Estonia (40% each), while countries with the lowest number of

women in business are the UAB (15%), India (14%), Argentina (22%), Chile and Turkey (24% each)

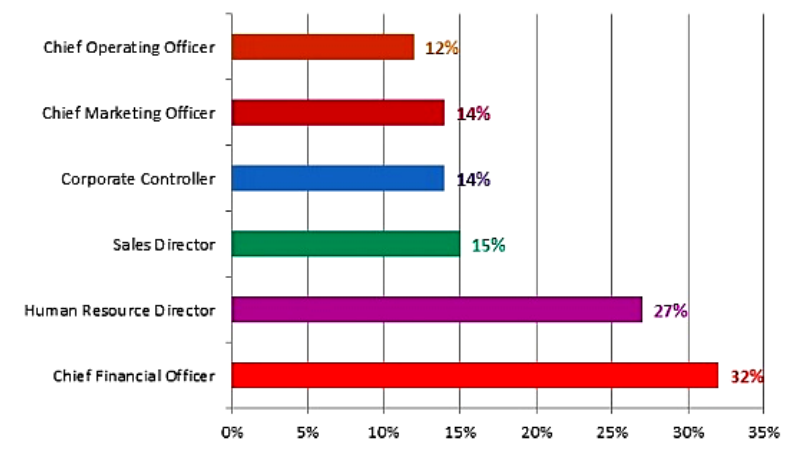


- 19% of those on company boards globally are women. Leaders are Russia (38%), Thailand (34%), Philippines (35%), Vietnam (32%) and Latvia

(31%) while at the other end of the spectrum lie Japan (8%), Switzerland (6%), UAB (13%), Malaysia (12%) and Brazil (12%).



(Grant Thornton International business report 2013: Women in business – Top six roles for women in senior management level)



*Source: www.gt.co.za/news.com

7. Indian Scenario of Glass Ceiling

Indian companies lag behind in according senior management roles to women. Despite being highly educated and qualified, women personnel often remain in lower management positions with little access to challenging assignments (Jain & Mukherji, 2010). There are stunning statistics which elude the corporate world. Women account for nearly 40% of the total workforce in Indian corporate houses, but their presence is less than 7% when it comes to board level positions. According to a recent study, only 26.1 percent of the listed companies (392 of 1,500 firms) have a woman on their boards. Out of the 278 directors on the BSE sensex companies, there are only 10 women directors. Apart from this, women executives in India earn 40 percent less than what men earn over their entire career. Even when compared to global counterparts, corporate India stands below average. Over 77% of the 200 largest companies in the world, as ranked by Fortune, had at least one women director on their board as of 2006. Only 36 percent of Indian companies have women holding senior management positions as compared to 91 percent of companies in China. India is ranked 28th in terms of the presence of women directors on company boards. The following figures force us to ponder on how successful women have been in breaking the glass ceilings.

- Female Literacy rate is 65.46%
- 95% of Indian female workforce is employed in the informal economy.
- Women form 63% of the lowest paid labor, but only 15% of the highest paid workers.
- India ranks 136th worldwide in women's economic participation.
- Gender pay gap in corporate India stands at 27%
- A report from Grant Thornton shows that proportion of women occupying top leadership positions in domestic companies increased from 17% in 2017 to 20% in 2018.
- In 2015, Women held only 5% of board directorships of BSE-100 companies

- Out of 323 total executive directorship positions (generally considered to be prerequisites to holding the CEO positions) on the Bombay Stock Exchange 100, less than 4% (2.5%) are held by women.
- A study of the Bloomberg data on gender composition of boards of 91 companies of the BSE-100 index reveals the median number of women on an Indian board was two in 2018-19, up from one five years ago. However, women constituted only 14 per cent of the board, albeit higher than the median 10 per cent half a decade ago.
- The most gender-diversified board (of Apollo Hospitals NSE -7.44 %) among the BSE-100 index has 42 per cent women on it, while the least diversified board (of ONGC) has 6 per cent representation of women. Public sector undertakings (PSUs) have been the traditional laggards in improving the diversity quotient of their boards. They comprised four of the top ten BSE-100 companies with the worst diversity ratios at the board level
- Gender Diversity Benchmark, 2011, reports that India has the lowest national female labour force and the worst leaking pipeline for junior to middle level position women.
- 28.71% of those at the junior level of the workplace
- 14.9% of those at the middle level.
- 9.32% of those at the senior level.
- Having a woman director on the board seems to be for the minimum compliance of the Companies Act, 2013 for one-fourth of the BSE-100 companies. Of the 91 companies, 24 have been consistent in having only a single woman director through each of the past five years.

Discriminating Gender: Interpretation

Gender discrimination of women at workplaces causes exploitation of the women. Exploitation, in any form, is an

expression of violence, as violence, according to the World Health Organization, is the deliberate use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. The practice of 'glass ceiling' finds expression of violence in different forms. Woman managers are subject to exploitation when they are made victims of gender discrimination while working in organizations. Some of the types of exploitations women face during the course of their stay in an organization include:

Psychological Blow: Glass ceiling encompasses using various tactics to undermine a woman's self-confidence and esteem by indulging in acts such as yelling, insults, mockery, threats, abusive language, humiliation, harassment, contempt and deliberate deprivation of emotional care or isolation.

Physical Assault: The most common form of physical exploitation ranges from pushing a woman intentionally to hitting, employing physical abuse with a weapon, physical torture, etc.

Sexual Harassment: Any form of non-consent based sexual activity that entails harassment, unwanted sexual and insinuating touching, rape, and disrespect to femininity of a woman etc. This form of violence also includes incest which is raising its ugly face in hidden ways in the present scenario.

Financial Stringency: Various forms of maneuvering tactics to thwart the financial rights of women are practiced. It can take the form of complete or partial control of finances, inheritance or employment income, hijacking perks and allowances etc.

Spiritual Attack: Indulging in activities like forcing women workforce to convert their religion by showing them fake pecuniary benefits arising from the same, is an act of spiritual exploitation. Other instances include behavioral aspects that serve to destroy women's cultural or religious beliefs through ridicule or punishment etc.

The UN has identified the following causes of discrimination against women:

- **Historically unequal power relations:** The political, economic and social processes that have evolved over many centuries have perennially kept men in a position of power over women.
- **Control of women's sexuality:** In many societies violence is used to punish women who exhibit sexual behavior, preferences and attitudes that violate cultural norms.
- **Cultural ideology:** Culture defines gender roles and some customs, traditions and religions are used to justify violence against women when women transgress these culturally assigned roles.
- **Gender stereotyping:** Lippman in 1922 introduced the term stereotype to represent the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group. Women employees are generally taken

to be humble, modest and accommodating. Women "shy away from competition and men compete too much, this decrease the chances of women succeeding in competition for promotions and more lucrative jobs" (Jain & Mukherji, 2010).

- **Gender Insensitivity:** Although women managers at senior levels in organizations have tried to introduce some gender-friendly policies, it has been successful in a few cases only. Several of the women managers at the middle level have stated that they had to take a break from work and their career for family reasons, because their companies were not sensitive enough to appreciate the situation
- **Government inaction:** Government negligence in passing a suitable and stringent legislative framework to curb the practice of glass ceiling has aggravated the problem. The major reason for this is the disguised nature of this practice. Organizations always succeed to find a solid ground to explain why they have not given promotions to the women managers working in their organizations.

Glass Ceiling: The aftermath

- **Loss of Productivity** Women who are victims of glass ceiling and sexual discrimination lose motivation and morale necessary to perform their jobs effectively. This leads to loss in productivity of women in their assigned roles.
- **Fewer Promotions** Stereotypical views related to women cause supervisors to engage in the illegal practices of by-passing women for promotion/ advancement due to preconceived notions about their roles and abilities.
- **Inequality in Performance Appraisal** Women are subject to prejudice while assessing their potential and efficiency parameters.
- **Gender Inequality** This is present in unseen covert and overt expressions of work organizations with women bearing the brunt of gender discrimination.
- **Challenging Tasks** Unachievable tasks and responsibilities are assigned to women ignoring their natural physical constraints and key roles like motherhood.
- **Destruction of self-worth** Those discriminated against feel such strong resentment and loss of self-worth that they resort to destructive practices to settle scores with the employer or coworkers. Destructiveness may manifest itself as physical violence against others, destruction of property or spreading of defiling rumors about people in organization.

Recommendations to break the mould of Glass ceiling

- Support of top management is a pre requisite to advance women in managerial and leadership roles.

Senior management must commit to support proactively to gender diversity in the organization.

- The organizations should consciously identify the barriers in the culture of work environment that impedes the progress of women.
- Training programs, such as mentorship, career guidance, and leadership development should be implemented to address the problems of stereotyping of women.
- Financial support should be enhanced for women in the non-traditional fields, such as science and engineering.
- A well-defined gender sensitive approach should be adopted in organizations to understand the needs and issues related to female workforce. The focus should be on chalking out mutual solutions to curb the practice of glass ceiling in the organizations.
- The government should keep a vigil on the unfair practices hindering the progress of women managers. Women Cell needs to be formed at state and district level to monitor the menace of glass ceiling.

8. Conclusion

Glass ceiling as a barrier has been studied extensively in the global context. However, it remains largely an under researched area in the Indian scenario. There are apparently invisible barriers that prevent more than a few women from reaching the top levels of management. This phenomenon exists even in the 21st century when globalization and technological advances have brought about 360 degree changes in all walks of life.

In 2015, IMF Chief Christine Lagarde predicted that higher participation of women in the labor force can result in 27% increase in GDP of a country. The lion's share of

leadership positions throughout the world remain a male preserve as an invisible barrier Prevents women from reaching the highest corporate levels. Glass ceiling is a form of gender discrimination which hinders the progress of women at the economic front. Proper policy planning and rectifying the institutional defects will be instrumental in eradicating this social and economic menace. Though women are being included in the workforce to add diversity in the work culture, the evil is still prevalent manifold. The lion's share of leadership positions throughout the world remain a male preserve as an invisible barrier Prevents women from reaching the highest corporate levels. There are several advantages of having female managers on board. The study concludes and underlines the following from women's participation on boards and in senior management positions.

1. Women managers inject empathy, flexibility, communication and collaboration into the team.
2. Women cater to 'social sensitivity' and collective intelligence by bringing together varying perspectives, opinions and expertise.
3. Research undertaken by World Bank, IMF and other banks in recent years have proved beyond doubt that gender diversity in senior leadership roles boosts business performance.

It is extremely unfair to treat this rich and diversified 'human resource' merely on the basis of gender. With women representing half of India's population, India cannot afford to ignore female representation in its workforce, particularly senior positions. The mental framework of organizations with female talent pipeline needs to be revolutionized.

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