

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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**GLASS CEILING: HAS IT BEEN BROKEN OR STILL PERSISTS?**

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**ABSTRACT**

The last decade has seen a sea change in the development of socio cultural environment and rise of corporate sector in the Indian economy. But still a lot of women are struggling and finding ways to get upto the top. Still in year 2013, we are counting firsts of women in corporate sectors, houses and boardrooms of MNCs. The barrier which is still valid and is holding women back is the Glass Ceiling. Ambition, Leadership, Rights, Power, Multiple roles, Social definitions etc. a number of factors holding women back in middle managerial levels. Glass ceiling, as can't be denied, must get the attention for its removal from the corporate culture

**KEYWORDS**

Glass ceiling, women, corporate, culture, barriers.

**THE CONCEPT OF "GLASS CEILING"**

**W**omen advance in the workplace but still trail men."

Gay Brant (1984) tried to explain the reasons behind the decision of women to change jobs. She, for the first time, used the term 'Glass Ceiling' in the context of women's reactions to hit it. She stated, "Women have reached a certain point-I call it the glass ceiling. They are in the top of middle management and they are stopping and getting stuck. There isn't enough room for all those women at the top. Some are going into business for themselves. Others are going out and raising families. The term was also referred in the book 'The working woman report, succeeding in Business in the 80's.'"

The term was popularized by the Hymowitz, Carol and Timothy D. Schellhardt (1986) by coining it in 'The Wall Street Journal' article. U.S Department of Labor (1991) defined Glass Ceiling as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions." The term Glass Ceiling continued to evolve. It is generally used for women in the workplace but it is applicable on other minorities as well. . If glass ceiling is intended merely as a more colorful phrase to describe what we already mean by gender bias then we are proliferating concepts that may ease our communication with the public. Four basic criterion have been defined which define the presence of Glass Ceiling.

The first one according to the **Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995a:iii)**, the concept of glass ceiling refers to "artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities." These barriers reflect the discrimination..... a deep line of demarcation between those who prosper and those left behind". The glass ceiling is the "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements"(Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995b:4; emphasis added).

The second one as mentioned by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission and also emphasized by **Wright, Baxter and Birkelund (1995)**, argues that the *Glass Ceiling Inequality assumption is not simply a claim about the existence of discrimination within the hierarchies; it claims that the discrimination increases as one move up the hierarchy.* The last two criteria are closely related. One states that *Glass Ceiling represents a gender of racial inequality in the chances of advancement to higher level.* The promotions to higher positions and raises of income are the proper subjects of Glass Ceiling tests (**Naff & Thomas 1998; Reskin & Padavic 1994; Stroh, Brett & Riley 1996**).

Alongwith, a few studies explicitly define the Glass Ceiling as the disadvantages that grow over the career (e.g. **Morgan 1998**). Thus, *Glass Ceiling of inequality represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career.*

Adding the perspective of Indian Constitution, women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men and even the Constitution guarantees the free primary schooling for everyone (whether girl or boy) till the age of 14 years. Only 39percent of the total women population go to a primary school.

While defining The Glass Ceiling more precisely, it is not being suggested that this type of inequality is more unjust or larger than the other types of inequality nor it is believed to be more necessarily more deserving when it comes to policy intervention than other types of inequality. It is different and it requires distinction than other types of inequality.

**Where does lie the roots of the glass ceiling?** We suppose that the glass ceiling is the result of a vicious cycle of undervaluing the potential of women and then ultimately getting an undervalued social structure.

According to the literature review carried out by Dugan et al. (1993) there are several potential causes for the Glass Ceiling which can be categorized into three categories, like, systemic barriers, stereotypes and bias, individual factors and group differences. Systemic barriers are the practices and policies inhibiting women to be part of the career upstream. Stereotypes and bias are the underlying assumption that the women and other minorities are not sufficiently suitable for the managerial positions. Stereotypes are the products of a normal psychological process of categorization, whereby intracategory similarities and intercategory differences are accentuated (Tajfel, 1982).Bias and stereotypes often result in gender inequality and influences the performance evaluations. Individual factors and group differences include education, experience, willingness to relocate, greater role in family care etc.

**FROM WHERE HAS THE GLASS CEILING BEEN BROKEN?**

It is certainly a landmark in the midst of the world talking about gender equality that the Asian women have made a mark by becoming powerful women in bug corporations abroad. Cisco chief technology officer Padmasree Warrior, finance high-flyer Sheila Hooda, high-tech innovator Anita Goel and former World Bank and McKinsey & Co consultant Rohini Dey are emblematic of the plodding progress of women.

The largest number of women CEOs today in India is in the finance and banking sector where the country's second biggest bank, ICICI Bank, and its third-largest, Axis Bank are headed by women. Chanda Kochhar is the Managing Director and CEO of ICICI Bank, while ex-ICICI Prudential Chief Shikha Sharma heads Axis Bank. In addition there is Kalpana Morparia as country head of JP Morgan, Naina Lal Kidwai at HSBC and Meera Sanyal at ABN Amro. Manisha Girotra heads UBS, Ashu Suyash Fidelity International in India and half of the deputy governors at the Reserve Bank of India are women. 11% of the women CEOs are in media and

another 11% in pharmaceuticals. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw is the chairman and MD of Biocon and Preetha Reddy is MD of Apollo Hospitals Enterprise. 8% in FMCG and consumer durables like Vinita Bali of Britannia and Nadia Chauhan of Parle Argo. In manufacturing sector we have Neelam Dhawan heading the Hewlett-Packard.

Indira Nooyi, CEO of Pepsi Worldwide, is one of the most successful business women. She has been listed as one of the most influential female CEOs for the past six years in Forbes Fortune 500.

With the amendment in the HUF succession norms in 2005, which allowed girls to inherit equal shares in family businesses, India has seen the opening of doors of family businesses for women. It improved the status of daughters of business families as potential heirs and heads of family businesses, despite being seen as marriageable assets alone. Lavanya Nalli, the first woman to take over the 83 year old brand of Nalli Sarees and the only woman from the family to enter the trade, expanded the business with new ideas. Roshni Nadar, daughter of HCL Technologies founder Shiv Nadar, took over the group's holding company. Ashni Biyani, daughter of Future Group (formerly Pantaloon) chief Kishore Biyani joined the business at twenty four. Lakshmi Venu, daughter of TVS Motors chief Venu Srinivasan, is one of the only three women managers in India's automobile industry administers operations in US. Preetha Reddy, daughter of Apollo Hospitals founder Parthap C. Reddy, was appointed as MD.

Hardwork can never be ignored in front of inheritance. Being head of an organization demands hardwork despite the factor of inheritance. According to Ms. Ameera Shah, MD and CEO of Metropolis Healthcare Ltd., a multinational chain of diagnostic centers, "there is no replacement for hardwork. It's the only way to success. It is the way to command respect and to be treated with seriousness". Ameera Shah, not being from medical profession, took over her fathers' single pathology lab and in six years transformed it to a fully integrated multinational chain of 70 diagnostic centres and 500 collection centers across South Asia, Middle East and Africa

Women CEOs in India currently head eleven percent of 240 large companies –Indian owned as well as multinational, private as well as state-owned-according to a study carried out by executive search firm EMA partners. In comparison, only three percent (i.e. 15) of the Fortune 500 companies have women CEOs and twenty eight Fortune 1000 companies have women in the top job. Although near the top there still remains slow progress in the number of female directors and highest paid. On the other hand, women receive about six in ten college degrees.

### THE FLIP SIDES OF GLASS CEILING (PERCEPTIONS)

According to Sangeeta Singh, the executive director for human resources at KPMG, Women tend to be self critical of their strengths and weaknesses and have a tendency to rebound gracefully from the setbacks. They tend to manage crisis intuitively and make sound judgments. They develop a nurturing environment for talent to grow.

Stereotypically the most important duty of a woman in her life is to raise the family and the career takes back seat in herself development and advancement. Career being thought to be men's world to play, underscores the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes. Women too believe that men are more competent and they take such stereotypes to heart while on the job. Social psychologists call this phenomenon "stereotype threat." This occurs when an individual who is a member of a group fears they will confirm a negative stereotype about their group. Spencer, Steele and Claude (1999) studied the stereotype threat and found that the women underperformed a math test when they are told that the test would reflect gender differences than vice versa. Negative stereotypes works in the opposite direction. Yeung & Von Hippel (2008) found that women who believed the stereotype of women being bad drivers were underperforming than others in a virtual driving game.

### COROLLARY OF GLASS CEILING

Denial of recognition, appreciation and acknowledgment for an equally deserving work is one of the foremost ill consequences of the glass ceiling. Cecilia Payne Gaposchkin discovered that the sun is made of mostly hydrogen, but her work was rejected by Astronomer Henry Norris Russell and later on after four years he published the paper for the same claim. Even though the Payne Gaposchkin's work was cited but still it was he who got the credit with her discovery.

Even the Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, CEO of Biocon Ltd., confirms the presence of glass ceiling in an interview with Darlington Jose Hector for The Times of India.

Gender inequality is one of the possible barrier forming the glass ceiling. According to Human Development Report, when the India's Human Development Index is adjusted for gender inequality, it makes India South Asia's worst performing country after Afghanistan.

The 'superwoman syndrome' as pointed out by Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz (1984) is a pressure on the woman to perform well in multiple roles. It is an expectation that she can and she should manage the worklife, family life and her own personal life well to justify her capability while on the other hand the counterpart males are not so stressed with multiple roles.

Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam (2004) pointed out the next phase to Glass ceiling i.e. Glass Cliff. Glass Cliff is the phenomenon in which the women are promoted into more risky, difficult jobs in which the chances of failure are higher.

While handling the dual role of being a career woman and a family oriented woman, women often face 'mommy track' in the career graph. Mommy track refers to the diminishing opportunities in the workplace upon becoming mommy. This contributes to the generally called 'M-shaped career graph' of a woman. She joins the corporate world, rises and then takes a break owing to family responsibilities (normally due to maternity reasons) and then again starts, puts efforts to rise in the career life.

Sexism is another excuse for letting the Glass ceiling to exist. It is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex. Sexist attitudes result from stereotypes of gender roles. Such attitudes lead to belief that one sex is intrinsically superior to a person of the other. Normally the reflections of such attitudes are in practices of variations in treatment or unequal compensation.

### MEASURING THE GLASS CEILING WITH INDEX

In 2013, 'The Economist' compiled 'The Glass Ceiling Index' to assess the chance for women to have equals with men at the workplace. The Index considers the data provided by the OECD and compares twenty six countries on five indicators i.e. the number of men and women respectively with tertiary education; female labour-force participation; the male-female wage gap; the proportion of women in senior jobs; and net child-care costs relative to the average wage. The results indicate that Finland has done best on education, Sweden has the highest female labour-force participation rate, and Spain has the smallest wage gap. New Zealand has the highest score on the Index and the ironic lowest score is of South Korea signifying the fact of few women holding down senior jobs with the new president a woman.

Giscombe & Mattis, 2013 emphasize the fact stating that it was impressive to see that a foreign-born Asian women has been able to ascend the highest level of corporate leadership.

According to the third Annual Women's Forum for the economy and society held in France, 2007, PricewaterhouseCoopers presented the results of its study of women in workplace across eight countries including several European countries, China and India according to which, women in developing countries find it easier to break through the so-called glass ceiling than their colleagues in the west and mentions few important factors which are holding women back in the West. Factors like the concept of Raven mothers or for that matter middle-class men with stay at home wives calls for long afternoon breaks and late leavings time in Spain for example. These hours are nearly impossible to reconcile with the responsibilities of childcare. (Stillman, 2007).

U.S is only amongst the handful countries which offers a paid maternity leave. If we compare U.S and European countries there is a stark contrast between them. On one hand there are companies in U.S like Yahoo and Best Buy who are banning work-from-home arrangement, in EU countries have legislated that parents can request part-time, flexible or telecommuting arrangements without any kind of penalty.

In countries like Germany and Spain it is required by the companies to keep a job open for employees on parental leave for as long as three years. (Rampbell, 2013)

Blau & Khan, 2013 have suggested that this may be the reason why U.S has fallen behind in women's labour force participation rates. They have also suggested that the same policy gap could explain why, paradoxically women in U.S may seem to have more varied and ambitious career paths open to them.



**CONCLUSION**

As rightly quoted by Dugan et al(1993) that since organizations are reflections of the society in which they exist, changing employment policies and practices cannot totally solve the problems discussed in this report until society as a whole resolves some of the issues of disparate treatment. As a result, the impact of even the most promising solutions may be limited by outside forces. However, changes in organizations to eliminate barriers to advancement may well be a first step towards breaking down these barriers on a societal level. Glass ceiling, further, leads to spiral effects such as sticky floor, glass cliff etc. Glass Ceiling is implicitly woven into the social structure and often showcases itself in the workplace. The inhibitions are supposed to be broken down to make the glass ceiling vanish altogether.

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