



CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: EXAMINING EXISTENCE OF GLASS CEILING AT WORK

Dr Bhawana Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor, HPUBS, HPU

ABSTRACT

In Vedic era women have been designated as Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati. The saying 'Yatra Naryastu Pujyante, Ramante Tatra Devta' means where women are worshiped, God resides. When we talk about women empowerment in Indian context few names immediately strike our minds. But naming few famous women personalities does not represent the status of Indian women at workplace. Today we speak about empowerment, involvement and employment of women in roughly each sector but are we able to provide them ample opportunities of growth? This paper attempts to ponder upon the presence of the glass ceiling at workplace. The paper also throws some light on global and India scenario of glass ceiling and tries to investigate presence and extent of glass ceiling at work place.

Key Words – Women Empowerment, Glass Ceiling, Glass Ceiling Index, Women Advancement

Introduction

Wall Street Journal coined a phrase “glass ceiling” in 1986. The phrase exemplifies a world where businesswomen’s attempt to reach top positions are hindered by corporate traditions and prejudices (Jackson, 2001). This ceiling can come in the form of institutional restrictions or societal and cultural perceptions due to which professional women come across barriers that

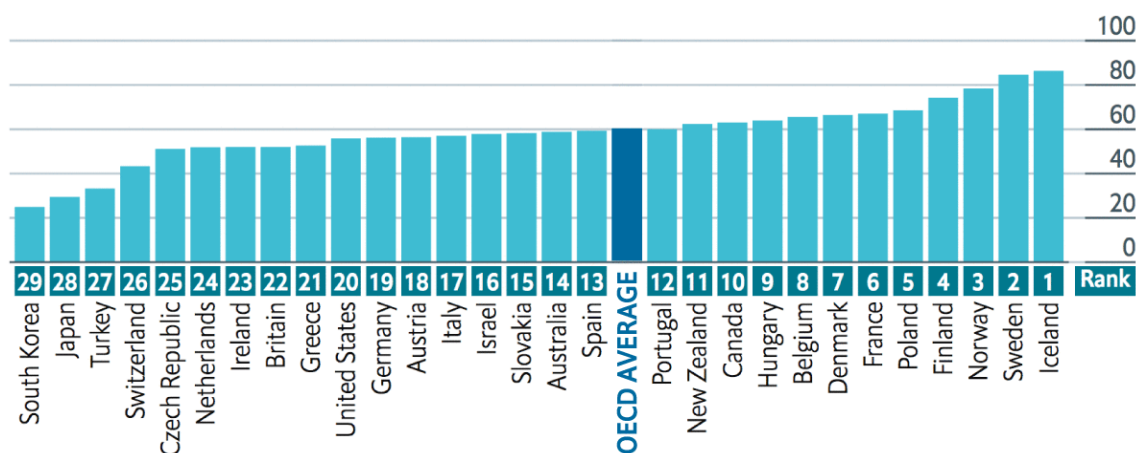
limit their career progression. There are two important factors that can create glass ceiling - structural obstacles and behavioral differences (Sonnert and Holton, 1996). Structural obstacles comprise of barriers defined by the organizational practices and policies while behavioral differences are mirrored in corporate culture and societal traditions. The prominent areas of glass ceiling are promotion junctures. However, it can come in other forms as well. This promotional hurdle can be institutional, occupational, policies or practices.

The ceiling becomes obvious when women have to struggle to obtain equal access and opportunities in the organizations. It has also been linked to under-utilization of women competence, beginning at lower-level management positions and extending upward. Sometimes women are put in positions of condensed visibility and their ideas are frequently unnoticed. This generates the invisible-woman syndrome where even the presence of women in the organization is ignored. Barriers for women are not curbed to particular job levels. In most occasions these barriers are reinforced by the image of women being followers and not leaders. Sometimes women themselves are accountable for their failure to get a hold of higher positions as they get minor opportunity to see other women as role models in key positions. This inhibits their own mental stimulation to see themselves as capable and acceptable leaders (Jackson, 2001). Not denying the fact that women are increasing their numbers in the labor force, but it does not infer that they are successfully reaching higher positions too. Their ambition to advance can be concealed by inadequate exposure to career building blocks such as professional leadership, training, and experience. These factors come under structural components. Behavioral impediments include gender stereotypes and expectations. Corporate culture nurtures the advancement of male career by favoring the male workers over women. Glass ceiling is sometimes enhanced by the conception that males feel endangered by the female presence with a perception to lose competitive advantage, control, and opportunity which may result into snagging of women success (Redwood, 1996). A Glass Ceiling Commission was appointed by the executive branch and chaired by the Secretary of Labor in 1991 with a purpose of empowering women. The aim of the commission was to identify hurdles of career advancement and broaden career possibilities and progression for women and minorities at workplace. The concept was thus defined as “invisible, artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization and reaching full potential” (*The Glass Ceiling Commission*, 2003).

Glass Ceiling: An Overview of Global Scenario

Recently a report on Glass ceiling index (Economist, 2017) was released to identify the countries where women workforce have the maximum probability of equal treatment at work. The report combined data on various variables namely higher education, workforce participation, pay, child-care costs, maternity and paternity rights, business-school applications and representation in senior jobs etc. A total of 10 variables were taken into consideration. In this list Iceland is at top of the list and proved to be even better than the OECD average on most of the variables. The Nordic countries clearly have gone ahead of the world on gender equality at work. Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland, have clinched top four positions. Women make up 30-44 percent of company boards in these countries as compared to an average of 20 percent across the OECD while Japan, Turkey and South Korea are at the lowest in rank. Only 35 percent of women in Turkey are working or looking for work and just 16 percent have graduated from university. In South Korea, mere 2 percent of corporate directors are female. Women are underrepresented in management positions and on company boards and compose only 15 percent parliaments in these countries.

Figure 1 Glass Ceiling Index 2017

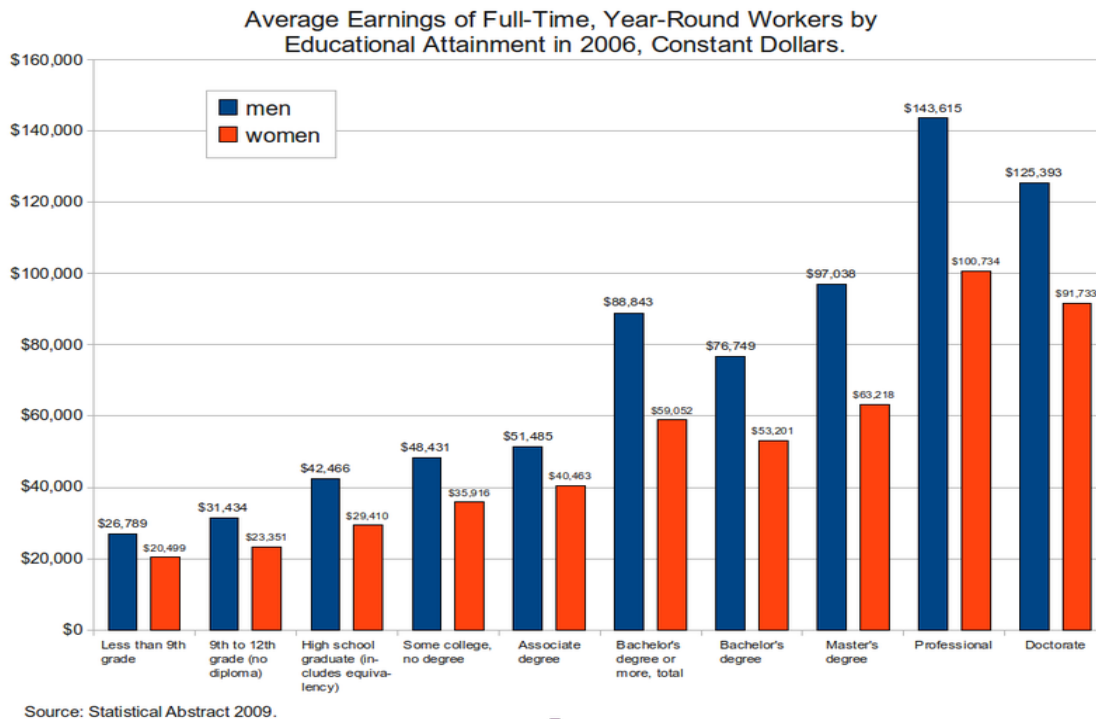


Source: www.economist.com

According to the report in OECD, women's labour-force participation rate of 63% has increased just by 3% since 2005. Gender wage gap is another hurdle for women empowerment

in most of the countries (Blau & Khan, 2003; Blinder, 1973; Bush & Holst, 2009; Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Arulampalam, Booth Bryan, 2006). There is not much change in the gap over last five years with women still earning around 85% of what men do. It has been found that women are earning 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. This is resulting into a lifetime income inequality between men and women. This inequality persists in almost all countries and all sectors. One of the major reasons of this wage gap is that the women’s work is underrated. For women of colour, immigrant women and mothers, the gap is even wider. “Motherhood penalty” acts as another hindering factors for career advancement of women pushing them to work in informal sector and taking up casual or part-time work (Bardasi & Gornick, 2008). Though, the gap is prevalent in both developing and developed countries it tends to be wider in developing countries (UN Women Organization, 2017). Even developed countries like United States of America have evidence of pay inequality. Figure 2 clearly depicts the pay differences of men and women having same educational qualification but a huge inequality in the salary received in their respective fields. It is evident that even after getting same educational qualification women are drawing lesser salary than their men counterparts.

Figure 2: Inequality in wages between men and women of the same educational level in USA



Percentage of Female CEOs in the Fortune 500 also have dropped down to 4 percent (Zarva, 2016). Though 29 new companies were added to the list but it had one woman at the top. According to the list released in 2016, 500 companies has just 21 women CEO which is even lesser than 2014 (women CEO were 24). Though there are multiple reasons behind it but the number could not increase. A study conducted by International Labour Organization (ILO) in December 1997¹ on 'Women's progress in workforce' stated that though women had made substantial progress in closing the gender gap in managerial and professional jobs, still women are barred from the top positions, in both the private and public sectors.

Table1: Percentage of Board Seats held by Women

S.No	Country	Percentage
1.	Norway	36.7
2.	France	29.9
3.	Sweden	24.4
4.	Italy	22.3
5.	Finland	22.1
6.	Denmark	21.8
7.	Belgium	18.3
8.	Germany	18.3
9.	South Africa	17.5
10.	New Zealand	17.5
11.	Netherlands	17.3
12.	Austria	16.3
13.	Israel	16.2
14.	United Kingdom	15.6
15.	Australia	15.1
16.	Ireland	14.4
17.	Canada	13.1
18.	Spain	12.5
19.	United States	12.2
20.	Luxembourg	11.5
21.	Malaysia	10.4
22.	Switzerland	10.0
23.	Turkey	10.0
24.	Thailand	9.7
25.	Greece	9.6
26.	Singapore	9.0
27.	China	8.5
28.	Hong Kong	8.4
29.	India	7.7
30.	Philippines	7.4
31.	Colombia	7.0

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/docs/RES/292/f267981337>

32.	Brazil	6.3
33.	Mexico	6.2
34.	Russian Federation	5.7
35.	Taiwan	4.9
36.	Chile	3.8
37.	Indonesia	3.7
38.	Japan	2.4
39.	Republic of Korea	1.7

Source: Women in the boardroom -a global perspective retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com>

Table1 exhibits the scenario of women participation in boardroom across the globe . On the basis of data collected for nearly 6,000 companies in 40 different countries by Delloite(2015) it is evident that women are not in good number in the board members.

Glass Ceiling : Indian Scenario

Women empowerment in Indian context is mostly associated with few names such as P.V Sindhu, Indira Nooyi, Ms.Chanda Kochar, Ms.Saina Nehwal, Priyanka Chopra etc. Today, when we speak about women empowerment these are few names that immediately smack our minds. But the question is- Do these few names really represent the entire women workforce in India? The Glass Ceiling Index(2017) makes a clear picture of workplace scenario that it is still existing in most of the organizational environment over various countries. Though, India is not included in the countries for calculation of Glass ceiling Index, but according to a report by UNDP² women leaders have to deal with gender inequality in India . India has an affluent history of women in position of power, however the country stand at 129 out of 146 countries on the Gender Inequality Index and women in India facade barriers at all levels. Women constitute roughly half of the population and consequently need to have equal importance and status. Glass ceilings at workplace is still existing and need to be broken (Saraswathy,2017).

Various organizations in India claim having policies for cracking glass ceiling. State Bank of India (SBI) announces that its employees particularly women can work from home . But on the other hand top management executive was ignored for a C-Suite position due to her gender. Though Indian organization are trying to remove the barrier and gender pay gap has

² <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2012/03/14/breaking-the-glass-ceiling-in-india.html>

lessened by two percentage from 27.2 per cent in 2015 to 25 per cent in 2016 (Financial Chronicle, 2017) ,but glass ceilings are yet to be devastated. The gender pay gap in India stands at 27%, according to a report by Monster India (Dadhwal, 2017).Indian women earn a median gross hourly salary of Rs 207.85 , while men get Rs 288.68 per hour. Out of all the sectors a gender pay gap of 17.7% which is lowest was recorded in the banking, financial services & insurance (BFSI) and transport sectors, while manufacturing sector are at the highest with a pay gap of 34.9%. Some of the reasons attributed are the preference for male workers over female employees, predilection given to male employees when it comes to promotions to supervisory positions. The other major reasons are career breaks taken by women due to parenthood duties and other socio-cultural factor.

There is a dire need for concrete initiatives to bridge this gap and getting rid of structural obstructions to women's growth. Though progressive companies are taking some initiatives like work-life benefits or flexible conditions for women, but still some biases do slink in. For instance, a pregnant woman is often dejected from taking up important projects in anticipation of her quitting or ignoring office duties (Saraswathy, 2017). It was accepted by women employees in a survey that initiatives are being taken to create a more inclusive environment for women growth. However, 62.4 percent women feel that their male counterparts get more promotions opportunities and gender persist to play a role in promotions along with other parameters (Financial Chronicle, 2017). Around 68.5 per cent respondents accepted that though gender parity is a priority still, there is not much change in the situation. The other major cause for glass ceiling is that women are forced to give up their jobs or take leaves due to life stage needs like maternity and child care. It has taken 15 long years for 17 women in India to become CEO in 500 largest companies in India. Seven out of these 17 women are from BFI while IT sector which employs one third of workforce as women have no women CEO.

Table 2 presents the information about various women CEO and Chairpersons heading different organizations in India. Over a period of time Indian women have been able to crack glass ceiling through their talent, skills and dedication. Mrs.Indira Nooyi joined Pepsi Co. in 1994 and turned the company into a bold risk taker. Wall Street Journal included her name in their top 50 women in 2005. Fortune magazine declared her 11th most powerful women in business.She also accepted the presence of glass ceiling in corporate world. Mrs Nooyi has

accepted the fact that a woman and especially a person of colour have to face various unseen hurdles to reach upto such positions (Chopra, 2011)

Table:2 Women CEOs in BSE 500 Companies

Company	CEO	Designation
Apollo Hospitals	Suneeta Reddy	Managing Director
Axis Bank	Shikha Sharma	Managing Director & CEO
Biocon	Kiran Mazumdar Shaw	Chairperson & Managing Director
CRISIL	Ashu Suyansh	Managing Director & CEO
HDFC	Renu Sud Karnad	Managing Director
ICICI bank	Chanda Kochar	Managing Director & CEO
Indoco Remedies	Aditi Kare Panandikar	Managing Director
Jindal Saw	Sminu Jindal	Managing Director
LIC Housing Finance	Sunita Sharma	Managing Director & CEO
Lupin	Vinita Gupta	CEO
Mahindra Life	Anita Arjundas	Managing Director & CEO
Monsanto India	Shilpa Divekar Nirula	Managing Director
NMDC	Bharathi S Sihag	Managing Director
PNB	Usha Ananthasubramanian	Managing Director & CEO
State Bank of India	Arundhati Bhattacharya	Chairman
TVS srichakra	Shobhana RamaChandhran	Managing Director
VIP Inds	Radhika Pirmal	Managing Director

Source: Economics Times

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw became the first female master brewer in Biocon. Simone Tata with her visions changed small unknown cosmetics company into one of the leading cosmetic companies of India. Similarly there are few such names who have set an example for others. But these successful women represents a very little proportion of India Women .The 2010 McKinsey³ report revealed that the there is increase in the number of female university graduates . But that is not sufficient to bridge the gender gap in top management positions and had negligible impact on women’s representation in executive committees. The presence of women in top management and leadership roles does not represents the total workforce population. Glass ceiling today is a sign that illustrates an environment in organizations that does not builds an ecosystem for women to grow and advance their career. The great number of

³ www.mckinsey.com

women are typically found at the entrance level and plunge dramatically in senior and board level roles. The potential reasons which were identified for this ceiling are-

- lack of flexible work solutions
- masculine and patriarchal corporate culture
- lack of adequate work life balance priorities
- lack of networks and mentoring
- lack of opportunities of critical work experience and responsibility
- lack of adequate information about existing diversity policies and practices
- lack of leadership & organizational commitment
- lack of adequate re-entry opportunities etc.

Conclusion and Discussion

Traditionally, women have been under-represented in organizations and the dispute for equal opportunity employment has not given sufficient results in India and Globe. Some figures have shown improvement in the number but still there is a long way ahead. Now a days organizations have understood the importance of workforce diversity and are facilitating women employees to enter the organization. But, there is lack of support and policy to advance their career. In this paper we have found the presence of glass ceiling which is an unseen hurdle obstructing the growth of women at workplace. As organizations are struggling with a shortage for talent, smarter companies are beginning to recognize the chance in developing and retaining women. Some stereotypes and prejudices, in male controlled society hold back women with leadership abilities from ascending the ladder of success. The fact that legislation, labor policies, and cultural perceptions are playing a role to reduce the gap between male and female employment, but there is a lot of work to be done.

Attitudes are gradually shifting. Gender diversity program and initiatives to train women for leadership roles have also become the characteristic for a number of companies. The women membership in board have doubled over last few years (Credit Suisse,2016).According to Catalyst India Benchmarking report 17 per cent of Indian companies have offered target leadership development programs for women. But overall social conditions and preference for family also play a role in hindering women from rising to board levels. The growing societal

recognition of women in the corporate environment surely aids the inflow of career-seeking women and motivates them to take benefit of higher promotion opportunities. The movement is tough but women has started pushing through and are cracking the ceiling. Ultimately, giving up the societal view on historic gender based role patterns will be the instrument for empowering women to remove the unwavering glass ceiling. The endurance of women to create a culture that is subjugated by male philosophy is also dependent on their willingness to confront barriers. Therefore, strong willpower, inspiration and continuous learning on the part of women is also demanded.

From time to time government also formulates policies, procedure and legislation to support women empowerment. Initiatives such as Women Labour Cell, Equal Remuneration Act (1976), Grants-in-aid Scheme, Guidelines on Sexual Harassment of Women Workers, Maternity Benefit Act(1961), National Commission for Women, Reservation for Women in Local Self – Government, National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 etc are facilitating women career advancement. It is very important that we acknowledge, publicize and celebrate even little step towards improvement especially on the global stage, because it affects and motivates so many lives (Jadesimi, 2016). However, there is a significant need to focus on the next step. Glass ceiling has started cracking there is a need to completely smash it. Though, there is a long way to go but continuous effort will help us to build a society where everyone is treated equally and have equal respect and chance to grow.

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