

Is Glass Ceiling An Impediment For Women Empowerment? An Analytical Observation

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ABSTRACT

This study throws back one of the substantial area in the Indian society that is Gender differentiation and lights up the areas how women can overcome this situation with the help of family and society. It highlights the questions to be posed by individual women by themselves like how to break the glass ceiling, how to build a network, how to build reputation and the approaches to break the glass ceiling. It ends up by drawing the conclusion how the women in the world and in India are able to break the glass ceiling in various sectors.

Key words

Glass Ceiling, Empowerment, Sociableness, Male Chauvinism, Stereotyping, Zenith

INTRODUCTION

Indian women are entering into new fields by breaking the glass ceiling from their traditional roles like daughter, wife, housewife (homemaker) and mother. They are actively participating in the social, economical and political activities. Most of the countries at present encouraging the participation of women in the various spheres despite of their traditional off-set roles. Modern women are inclined towards social issues and trying hard to improve the social status of women at large. Increased awareness and education has inspired women to come out

of their four walls of the home. Women empowerment is still at its footsteps in India as most of the women are depriving of their fundamental right: Right to Education. Women are really empowered in India only when they get access to education, social mobility and equal opportunity.

BACKGROUND

Women Empowerment refers to strengthening the social, economic and educational powers of women. It refers to an environment where there is no gender bias and has equal rights in community, society and workplaces.

"Glass ceiling" means an invisible upper limit in corporations and other organizations, above which it is difficult or impossible for women to rise in the ranks. "Glass ceiling" is a metaphor for the hard-to-see informal barriers that keep women from getting promotions, pay raises and further opportunities. The "glass ceiling" metaphor has also been used to describe the limits and barriers experienced by minority racial groups.

It is glass because it's not usually a visible barrier, and a woman may not be aware of its existence until she "hits" the barrier. In other words, it's not an explicit practice of discriminating against women, though specific policies, practices, and attitudes may exist that produce this barrier without

intention to discriminate. The term was popularized in the 1980s.

The term was invented to apply to major economic organizations like corporations, but later began to be applied to invisible limits above which women had not risen in other fields, especially electoral politics.

The U.S. Department of Labour's 1991 definition of glass ceiling is "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions." (Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative. U.S. Department of Labour, 1991.)

ORIGIN OF THE PHRASE

The term was used in a 1984 book, *The Working Woman Report*, by Gay Bryant. Later it was used in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article on barriers to women in high corporate positions.

The Oxford English Dictionary notes that the first use of the term was in 1984, in *Adweek*: "Women have reached a certain point -- I call it the glass ceiling."

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ann Morrison American Actress describes the problem: the glass ceiling is a barrier "so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up the corporate hierarchy." From their vantage point on the corporate ladder, women can see the high-level corporate positions but are kept from "reaching the top" (*Breaking the Glass Ceiling*).

According to Morrison and her colleagues, the glass ceiling "is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person's inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women."

What causes the "glass ceiling?" Here is what women executives think.

Job Segregation Runs Rampant

Just as the overall labour market remains sharply segregated by sex, women executives are concentrated into certain types of jobs - mostly staff and support jobs - that offer little opportunity for getting to the top. A 1986 Wall Street Journal survey found "The highest ranking women in most industries are in non-operating areas such as personnel, public relations, or, occasionally, finance specialties that seldom lead to the most powerful top-management posts." Women are locked out of jobs in the "business mainstream," the route taken by CEOs and presidents. But even when women can get a line job, it is not likely to be "in a crucial part of the business" or the type of job that can "mark them as leaders."

Old-Boy Network Still Strong

According to one executive recruiter, the biggest barrier to women in top management levels is the "bunch of guys sitting together around a table" making all the decisions. In short, when deciding who to promote into management, male corporate leaders tend to select people as much like themselves as possible - so it is no surprise that women

are frequently not even considered at promotion time. Instead, the men at the top look to former colleagues and old school ties; in both areas, women have been virtually absent.

Women executives are frequently excluded from social activities and often describe the "sociableness" among the men that exists at the top. The corporate executive suites are "the ultimate boys' clubs."

Even on a more formal level, women report there are "certain kinds of meetings" they don't get invited to because they are not seen as policy makers. Corporate women don't travel on business as frequently as men, according to surveys by Korn/Ferry International (1982) and Wall Street Journal/Gallup (1984). Studies confirm these differences in status and the different treatment of women. One study found that among executives at the same level, men "managed greater numbers of people, had more freedom to hire and fire, and had more direct control of the company's assets" than women (Harlan and Weiss).

Sex Discrimination Is Pervasive

In the Wall Street Journal/Gallup survey, women managers were asked what they consider to be the most serious obstacle in their business careers. Only 3% cited "family responsibilities," but half named reasons related to their gender, including: "male chauvinism, attitudes toward a female boss, slow advancement for women, and the simple fact of being a woman." In the survey by Korn/Ferry International, executive women were

asked to name the greatest obstacle they had to overcome to achieve success; the most frequent response was simply "being a woman" (40%). In a recent poll of 12,000 workers by the Los Angeles Times, two-thirds reported sex discrimination; 60% saw signs of racism.

More than 80% of the executive women in the Wall Street Journal/Gallup study said they believe there are disadvantages to being a woman in the business world. Men, they say, "don't take them seriously." In the same survey, 61% of the women executives reported having been mistaken for a secretary at a business meeting; 25% said they had been thwarted on their way up the ladder by male attitudes toward women. A significant majority - 70% - believed they are paid less than men of equal ability.

Sexual Harassment Is Widespread

Sexual harassment remains a serious problem for women in the managerial ranks. In a 1988 survey of Fortune 500 executives by Working Woman magazine, 90% of large corporations reported sexual harassment complaints by women employees. The survey found that "more than a third of the companies had been sued by victims; a quarter had been sued repeatedly." But, according to the same study, only 20% of offenders lose their jobs; 4 in 5 are merely reprimanded.

Sexual harassment "puts a woman in her place," so a corporate environment that tolerates sexual harassment intimidates and demoralizes women

executives. Many women hesitate to speak out, fearing it will jeopardize their careers.

Today, there are many more women and minorities in powerful positions. However, the glass ceiling is still very real. And it's not always limited to gender or race.

Have you been pushed up against a glass ceiling? This can happen for many different reasons. Are you too much the champion of change?

Do you have difficulty communicating your ideas? Are you quieter and less outgoing than the people who get promotions? Whatever the reason, you have a choice.

You can accept your situation and be happy with looking up and not being able to touch what you see or you can smash the glass with purpose and determination.

Identify the Key Competencies within Your Organization

Key competencies are the common skills and attributes of the people in your company's upper levels. These skills are often tied closely to the organization's culture and vision.

Companies that value innovation and strive to be leaders will probably promote individuals who are outgoing, risk takers, and not afraid to "tell it like it is." However, if you work for a conservative company (such as a publicly owned utility) chances are that top management are analytical thinkers, with a reputation for

avoiding risk and making careful decisions.

Are you facing a glass ceiling? Recognizing that the ceiling exists is the first step. The ceiling won't be removed unless you do something about it. Apply some of the ideas in this article, and monitor your progress.

How to break glass ceiling?

Let Yourself First Know.....

- I. What are the values of your organization?**
- II. What behaviours does your company value and reward?**
- III. What type of person is promoted?**

Understand what sets your company and its leaders apart. This is the first step toward discovering how to position yourself for a top leadership role.

Two universal competencies for top management are effective leadership and effective communication. Each of these is complex.

Set Objectives to Align Your Competencies with Top Management

Once you know your target, set goals to get there. You're responsible for determining your own career direction. Be proactive and go after what you want, because it probably won't be handed to you.

Do the following:

Let your boss know that you want to work towards a higher-level position.

Ask your boss what skill areas you need to develop?

Work together with your boss to set goals and objectives, then monitor and measure your performance.

Remember to concentrate on areas of your performance that you can improve. Don't set a goal to achieve a certain position by a certain time. This can be discouraging if it doesn't happen. For example, set a goal to consistently demonstrate assertive and clear communication. If you achieve that goal, no matter what job title you have, you've succeeded! See Personal Goal Setting for more ideas on how to define motivating goals.

Build Your Network

You should also build relationships with other people in your organization. You never know who may be in a position to help you or provide you with valuable information.

Ask these questions?

- I. Is there someone in upper management you can approach to help you?**
- II. Will your boss be able to provide mentoring support?**
- III. Are there people with strong political power who can offer you assistance?**

Build Your Reputation

Ultimately, the way to get ahead is to get noticed. You want people to see your competence, leadership abilities, communication skills, technical knowledge, and any other competencies that are typical of people at the top.

Develop your skills and network with people so that your name becomes associated with top management potential. To do this, you need to build a reputation as the kind of person who fits the description of top management. Visibility is very important. Remember, while you can see up, those at the top can see down. Make sure that what they see is you!

Indian women who overcome glass ceiling in various fields. Fast forwarding to modern times, Indian women have been showing their prowess in combat roles since the time they were allowed to be inducted. There have been some marvellous, inspiring role-models who have proved that nothing is beyond their reach and sky is no limit. Below are some of these women in Indian defence forces whose stories have been my inspiration.

1. Lt. General Punita Arora

Lt. General Punita Arora was the first woman in the Indian armed forces to be promoted to a three-star rank, a highly coveted position for anyone in the armed forces. She donned the position of Lieutenant General of Indian Armed Forces as well as the Vice Admiral of Indian Navy. She joined the armed forces via Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), one of the most prestigious medical institutions in the country, and the entry into the armed forces' medical field.

She stood out not just as a topper of her batch at AFMC, but also received a Sena Medal for pioneering invitro-fertilisation and assisted reproductive techniques for infertile and childless couples in military hospitals. Apart from the Sena Medal, she has also been awarded Vishisht Seva Medal, Param Vishisht Seva Medal, totaling up to 15 medals and awards for her contribution across. Let alone women, there are hardly a handful of men who have such impressive credits to their name.

2. Air Marshal Padmavathy Bandopadhyay

Following Lt. General Punita Arora, Air Marshal Padmavathy Bandopadhyay became the second woman in the Indian Armed Forces to be promoted to a three-star rank and the first woman Air Marshal of the Indian Force, the third highest rank in the Indian Air Force. For her invaluable contribution during the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971, she was awarded the Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM), an award that is given to recognize distinguished service of an exceptional order to all ranks of the Indian armed forces. She is also the first woman to have conducted scientific research at the North Pole, where she joined an Indo-Russian physiology experiment to study the ease of acclimatization of people from tropical Indian climates to extreme cold conditions. To add to a long list of honors and awards, she also became the first Indian woman officer to have completed the Defence Service Staff College course. She is an aviation medicine specialist and a member of the Indian Society of Aerospace Medicines, International Medical Society

and New York Academy of Sciences. Her list of accomplishments is quite long, with a total of 23 research projects and 27 publications to her credit. To top it all, she is the first Lady Honorary Surgeon to the President of India. Now, if that's not impressive and inspirational, I can't imagine what is!

3. Shanti Tigga

Shanti Tigga was in no way an ordinary woman! An epitome of perseverance and excellence, she outperformed all her male contemporaries to become India's first woman jawan at the age of 35, a position that wasn't deemed fit for women. She broke all sorts of barriers and stereotypes that existed around women in our country. Former Indian president, Ms. Pratibha Patil honored her for her extraordinary achievements. She had achieved a feat that was considered impossible for women. Although she met an unfortunate death, her contribution to the armed forces inspired the women all across the nation and gave them the confidence of taking any challenge head-on.

4. Flying Officer Gunjan Saxena

This is the name that people who think women aren't made for combat zones should look up for. During the Indo-Pakistan Kargil war of 1999, Gunjan Saxena flew her Cheetah helicopter right through the extremely hostile terrains of Kargil to retrieve injured soldiers, proving her mettle in Operation Vijay. She became the first ever woman pilot of Indian Air Force to fly in a combat zone. She also proved that age is no barrier when you are

passionate about your dreams, being just 24 years old with 3 years experience in the Indian Air Force. She was, in fact, from the first ever women trainee pilots batch of Indian Air Force. She truly redefined empowerment, breaking into the male bastion and setting an example for millions of Indians.

There are many types of women entrepreneurs in India – and each category contributes greatly to our economy. There are daughters, daughter-in-laws, and wives of affluent people in the society that form part of large business houses in India.

Think the likes of Nita Ambani, wife of Mukesh Ambani, chairperson of Reliance Foundation, a philanthropic institution focused on empowering marginalized communities. The Paul sisters – Priya and Priti – manage the Apeejay Group that also owns the Park Hotels. Then there are famous women - CEOs of large corporates – Debjani Ghosh, MD, Intel; or Chanda Kochar, CEO, ICICI Bank; who are the torchbearers of breaking the traditional glass ceiling.

A quieter segment of entrepreneurs are truly the unsung heroes – running small businesses of catering/cooking/beauty/accommodation that contribute to 14 percent of the SME sector (in turn contributing to 17 percent of the GDP as per NSSO).

Lastly, there is a segment of us (albeit a small one) who are running startups backed by venture funds. While we may be small, our numbers are growing, we are being able to attract more

capital, and we are gaining prominence in an erstwhile male-dominated segment.

One of the major contributing factors is the availability of capital for women entrepreneurs – Saha Fund, Trinity Capital, Female Founder's Fund, and many more focus solely on promoting and supporting female-led businesses. The Indian venture space is slowly seeing a change too – many large VCs, such as Seed fund and Kalaari Capital, are run with VCs who have women in majority. So, for those planning a new venture, take heed – access to capital means better odds for your business.

The Top 5 Women-Led Start-ups Smashing the Glass Ceiling In India

From e-commerce to financial services, women entrepreneurs are changing the narrative in the Indian start-up ecosystem slowly, but surely. They may be underrepresented in the sector, but women are building some incredible start-ups and products.

Two years ago, women constituted only 10% of the total number of entrepreneurs in the country. Now, women run about 14% of business organizations in India, according to the National Sample Survey Organization. On this International Women's Day, we look at the top five women-led start-up smashing the glass ceiling in India.

1. Upasana Taku: Mobikwik

She loves new challenges, does triathlons, and even travelled solo in the Amazon. Last year, she was featured on the Forbes Asia “Women to Watch” list. This 37-

year-old entrepreneur started Mobikwik, along with her husband Bipin Preet Singh in 2009, as an online service to make bill payments easier and has now morphed into a mobile wallet. In 2012, MobiKwik launched its first mobile app on the Android store, and attracted the interest of venture capital fund Sequoia Capital. Since then, it has raised \$80-85 million from investors in three rounds of funding, and plans to start the process for Series D this year. With clients like Uber and the Indian Railways in its kitty, Mobikwik sees 3 million transactions daily. Currently, it has 45 million users — it has seen a 400% surge in transactions during the demonetization of high-value currency by the Indian government last December.

2. Radhika Aggarwal: Shopclues

She's the first Indian woman to break into the unicorn club. Valued at over \$1 billion, Shopclues is one of India's home-grown e-commerce stars. Started in 2011, along with Sanjay Sethi, Shopclues became the ninth start-up to join India's unicorn club by raising about \$150 million from Singapore government's GIC and its existing investors Tiger Global and Nexus Venture Partners last year. What started with a team of 10 is now a 1,000-strong organisation. Prior to starting Shopclues, Aggarwal, a management graduate from Washington University, worked for diverse sectors including retail, e-commerce, fashion and lifestyle with companies such as Nordstrom and Goldman Sachs in the U.S. She looks after branding, marketing, acquisitions, sales, hiring and product mix at Shopclues. "There has never has been a better time

than now to do any kind of business in India," said Aggarwal. The e-tailer has about 350,000 small and medium sellers on the platform, and 14 million registered users. But, do people still stereotype the woman entrepreneur? "It's not as much about stereotyping. The challenges are the same in entrepreneurship, man or woman. The only challenge is that because there are so few of us, people end up asking questions like, 'How do you ensure work-life balance?' You need a support system at home and work as your responsibilities grow."

3. Richa Kar: Zivame

She is credited for bringing lingerie out of the closet. Aiming to make good quality lingerie accessible and affordable, Kar started Zivame in 2011. An engineer and a management graduate, Kar, in 2015, raised roughly \$40 million in a Series C round of funding from Zodiuss Technology Fund and Malaysian sovereign wealth fund Khazanah. The start-up had previously raised around \$9 million in two rounds of funding from IDG Ventures, Kalaari Capital and Unilazer Ventures.

"Our ability to offer a personalized experience along with our focus on educating the buyer and helping her select the right products is what differentiates us from the rest," said the 35-year-old entrepreneur.

In January, in what is being called an investor-led rejig, Kar, although she still retains the position as CEO, distanced herself from the day-to-day business operations of the portal, handing it over to Shaleen Sinha. This online lingerie retailer

transitioned into a private label business in a bid to improve its margins and thereby boost its revenues, and aims to be profitable by first quarter of 2018-19. The company also recently announced its Omni-channel strategy of adding 100 offline store and fitting centers across the country over the next two years.

4. Sabina Chopra: Yatra Online Inc

She started the online travel portal Yatra, along with Dhruv Shringi and Manish Amin in 2005. Back then India had only 21 million internet users, and sold barely 100 tickets a day. Today it sells over 25,000 a day. Fresh off its listing on NASDAQ, Yatra rebranded itself in January, and is aiming to become a one-stop shop for travellers. During the financial year that ended in March 2016, Yatra witnessed booking of more than 2.8 million air travel reservations and hotel stays with a total transaction value worth more than \$900 million, an increase of 25% from the previous year. The online portal also reverse-merged with Terrapin in a deal that assigned an enterprise value of \$218 million to the Indian online travel agency.

"My advice for women entrepreneurs — it is great to have an idea, but it is the execution that matters. Have a vision, find out whether it is feasible and work towards it. Success is bound to come your way," said Chopra.

5. Sairee Chahal: Sheroes

Acknowledging the lack of gender parity in India's workforce, she founded job portal Sheroes in 2014 to bring diverse resources, opportunities and support to

women. "We broke even in our first year of operation and now have more than 7,000 companies listed on our platform," says Chahal, who started her career as a journalist. Sheroes user-base expands to over 20,000 locations across India, and her robust initiative has already helped over 10,000 women, belonging to diverse categories — returning professionals, interns, entrepreneurs, corporate employees and work-from-home freelancers. The social and business impact of Sheroes has attracted investors' interest, raising series a round of funding of about \$2 million from Lumis Partners, HR Fund and Quint Media among others.

CONCLUSION

From the above study it is understood that still today in India women require support from family and peers to reach the zenith in the respective sector they are competing. When compared to other fields women's entering into business sector need strong support from their family as fund procuring is one of the biggest challenge. Finally in modern society women are giving tough competition to men by breaking the glass ceiling with the support of family and peers.

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