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Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Initiatives of Indian Industry (A Study with Special Reference to Exemplary Organizations)

Sarika G.

Research Scholar, SKIM, Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract:

Women encounter Glass ceiling the most while they are striving to move up the pyramid in their career. The metaphor “glass ceiling” refers to an invisible barrier that prevents someone from achieving further success. It is most often heard in the context of women who cannot advance to the highest levels of power in the workplace. Since women at workplace are becoming indispensable, the organizations are being proactive and taking wide initiatives to break such glass ceiling in their organizations. In this article an attempt is made to understand the concept of glass ceiling in various organizations. It examines the initiatives of some exemplary organizations in breaking such glass ceiling and also explores the ways or the strategies for breaking such glass ceiling.

Keywords: *Glass Ceiling, barriers for women in career progression, corporate strategies for breaking the glass ceiling*

1. Introduction

Women encounter Glass ceiling the most while they are striving to move up the pyramid in their career. The metaphor “glass ceiling” refers to an invisible barrier that prevents someone from achieving further success. It is most often heard in the context of women who cannot advance to the highest levels of power in the workplace. The barriers that women are encountering may be societal, family, organizational, individual. Since women at workplace are becoming indispensable the organizations are being proactive and taking wide initiatives to break such glass ceiling in their organizations. Women are performing really well while they are in the middle management position. They are great team-players; they work with all sincerity and commitment. But when they enter into childbearing and rearing phase, either they choose to stay at home or have to handle the pressures of being at work with a child at home. In this article an attempt is made to understand the concept of the glass ceiling in various organizations. It examines the initiatives of some exemplary organizations in breaking such glass ceiling and also it explores the ways or the strategies for breaking such glass ceiling.

2. Review of Literature

According to Koshal and Ashok Gupta (2001) it is the struggle between the woman’s motherhood and her career which affects her career progression. Kulkarni (2002) in his study “Women and Professional Competency” insists that traditional and cultural inhibitions obtained by women from childhood further nurtured by parents and duly reinforced by socialization are acting as major barriers which are preventing women to occupy the executive or leadership position. This is further supplemented by lack of self direction, independence and self motivation Another study conducted by Budhavar et al. (2005) on senior women in public and private sector firms found that there exists a discrimination against women, they further experience gender stereotyping which made them feel inferior to men and thus being offered less challenging roles and not made to take part in the important organizational issues. According to Thomson *et al.* (2008) argue that if there are at least three women in leadership positions there is a possibility that corporate and political groups to be supportive of women leaders. According to European Economic and Social Committee, (2009) Women are under-represented in all forms of leadership positions: political leadership, the senior civil service and corporate boardrooms. Interestingly it is found that the companies where women are most robustly represented are also the companies that perform best financially. According to Drury (2012), Women (and men) can overcome an unpleasant climate in the workplace with the help of mentoring relationships.

2.1. Need for the Study

In India, though a considerable increase of educated and working women has been identified still they are confined to lower levels in the organization. Women who could represent in the middle management level are comparatively lesser than men. Moreover, very few women are seen in boardrooms because in India still these board rooms are considered as non-women areas. In reality, there is no

significant change in the gender equations is found within corporations and businesses because such change is only superficial. The studies that have been carried out so far have tried to understand the various barriers for the glass ceiling. They have focused much on various impediments in career progress of women. It is observed that women in the 21st century are very talented, matured and well balanced. Hence there is a need to understand and examine in a greater depth to answer the question why many women in the corporate sector in India are not progressing and are not able reach top of the career ladder proportionately with men. These days, corporate world is welcoming gender diversity and using it for its advantage. In this backdrop a concrete study is needed to identify practices or initiatives undertaken by the corporate sectors to break such glass ceiling. Thus the present study has been carried out.

2.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To highlight the barriers that women come across when they want to rise up in their careers in Indian Industry.
2. To examine the existence of the Glass ceiling at various organizational levels in Indian Industry.
3. To study the strategies being adopted by the exemplary Indian organizations for breaking the glass ceiling.

3. Methodology

The study is mainly based on the secondary data which has been collected from various women organizations, portals, websites, news articles, interview excerpt of women CEOs etc. The study also relied on the informal discussions made with the Women Executives, Leaders etc.

3.1. Rising Significance Women Workforce in Industry

It's quite encouraging to identify that number of women holding chief executive positions in the reputed firms is enormously increasing these days. No doubt these are positive signals for India but this must be spread widely to every industry irrespective of its nature. The reasons behind such rise may due to the varied skill set possessed by women, such as in planning, organizing, directing, etc. Apart from these they are known for compassion, hardworking, loyalty and commitment. All these imbibe in them right from their childhood. In addition to these they are also striving to be creative, innovative, assertive, etc. which are required in the workplace. Moreover, there's evidence that female executives do the work with more diligence than their male counterparts: A study by the Conference Board of Canada, found 72% of boards with 2 or more females conduct formal board performance evaluations, while 49% of all-male boards do. Research by Catalyst Corporation shows that Fortune 500 companies with the highest proportion of women in senior management significantly outperformed others with the lowest proportion in both return on equity and total shareholder return. The following table reveals the major strengths identified in women, which enabled them to hold management positions.

Key Strengths of Indian Women as Managers
• Ability to network with colleagues
• Ability to perceive and understand situations
• Strong sense of dedication, loyalty and commitment to their organizations
• Ability to multitask
• Collaborative work style—solicit input from others, with respect for ideas
• Crisis management skills
• Willingness to share information (interactive leadership style)
• Sensitivity in relationships (e.g., compassionate, empathetic, understanding)
• Behaving in a gender-neutral manner

Table 1: Strengths of Indian women as managers

Source: Adapted from Budhwar, P. S., Saini, D. S., & Bhatnagar, J. (2005, June). Women in management in the new economic environment: The case of India. Asia Pacific Business Review, 11(2), 179-193.

3.2. Glass Ceiling

The very fact of women being adequately represented in the work-force, but hardly present in the senior managerial positions has been labeled “the glass ceiling”, “a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy”(Morrison & Von Glinow (1990; p. 200)

3.3. Causes of Glass Ceiling: The causes for glass ceiling may be classified in the following manner

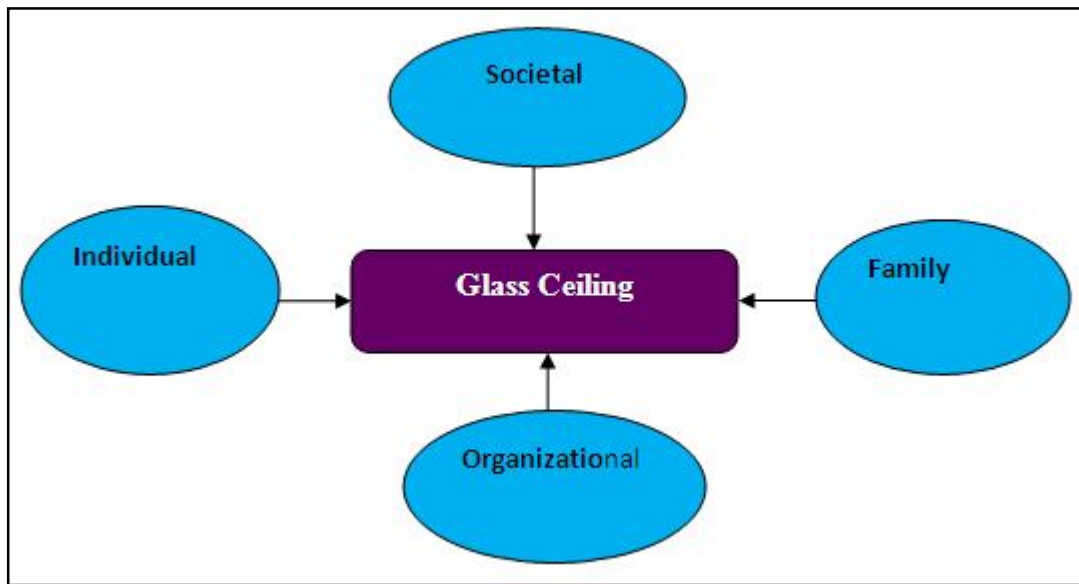


Figure 1: Causes of Glass Ceiling

- **Societal causes:** Women who climb higher positions are expected to be more responsible and need to be more proactive. In pursuit of such duties women need to break certain norms prescribed by the society like India which is characterized by the male dominated culture. Still our society undermines women coming late from the office. They are skeptical about such women who often will be touring for official purposes. People expect woman do participate in all the religious ceremonies, occasions, parties without fail despite of her busy schedule at work. Women who deny for all these are symbolized as mannish women. The socio-cultural perceptions which determine the attitudes and behaviors of individual men and women form barriers to the equal participation of women in senior management.
- **Barriers from the Family:** Women's career paths tend to be more complex and interrupted than those of men which are typically trajectory, and this impedes women's progress to top positions. Women often have to deal with the complexities of the multiple roles played by them in the family and at work. The reason behind may be responsibilities of women towards child care and elderly care. Many times they have to make compromises, prioritizing family life over work life which slows down their careers. Hence, married women with children are found less progressive than single women in their career.
- **Organizational impediments:** In majority of Indian companies gender stereotyping is still in existence. Unfortunately many men in upper management positions are still hesitant to promote women for fear of their emotions, and the perceived notion that they will often take time off to care for their family. Masculine corporate culture is yet another barrier for career growth of women. Male officers feel threatened when there is a strong independent minded women officer as a competitor. And that's when they start blaming women for being concerned about family or for being emotional and their achievements are not recognized.
- **Individual obstacles:** The psycho-social attributes, such as lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. It is observed that women are less ambitious this hindering her to go up in the career ladder. Infact most of the barriers for women are self perceived hence required to be changed. Moreover there are certain myths regarding competencies of women such as women have low potential for leadership, being less assertive, less emotionally stable and lacking ability to handle crisis.

3.4. Glass Ceiling- A Myth or Reality in Indian Industry

The following are statements passed by reputed women occupying higher positions in premiere organizations.

"The More We Talk About the Glass Ceiling, the Greater Disfavor We Do To Ourselves, As Women" -Kalpana Morparia, CEO, JP Morgan

"There Is A Business Case For Having More Women In The Higher Rungs"-Shyamala Gopinath , Deputy Governor Of The Reserve Bank Of India

"Glass Ceiling For Women Is A State Of Mind That Needs To Change"-Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairman & Managing Director, Biocon

"The Glass Ceiling Is One of Life's Obstacles"-Preeti Vyas Giannetti- Sayantani Kar, Chairperson & CEO, Vyas Giannetti Creative
Though there is a solid glass ceiling which is impeding women's movement in their upward ladder of career growth. Women must never adopt this self-defeating belief in a glass ceiling beyond which they cannot soar. Women should consider it as a Myth and women with talent and determination must keep on hewing it till it is broken away completely. This must be accepted as a Reality. Corporates, too, must judiciously support women who strive each day to balance domestic realities with career dreams.

3.5. Effects of Glass Ceiling in Various Levels

According to a study by McKinsey & Company, India is featured among the bottom three Asian nations in female representation on boards of directors. Only five per cent women are found on executive boards. As per the survey the top 10 most powerful global Indian Business Leaders of the year 2012, conducted by Economic Times, LN Mittal of Arcelor Mittal tops the list of most powerful Global Indian Business Leaders; Indra Nooyi of PepsiCo gets to occupy the second spot. Further survey has also identified Top 10 most powerful women CEOs of the year 2012 is presented in the table: 2.

S. No.	Name	Organisation
1.	Chanda Kochhar	ICICI BankBSE -1.57 %
2.	Kiran M Shaw	Biocon
3.	Shobhana Bhartia	HT MediaBSE 1.64 %
4.	Shikha Sharma	Axis Bank
5.	Naina Lal Kidwai	HSBC India
6.	Kalpana Morparia	JP Morgan India
7.	Neelam Dhawan	Hewlett-Packard India
8.	Mallika Srinivasan	TAFE
9.	Preetha Reddy	Apollo Hospitals
10.	Roopa Kudva	CRISILBSE -0.82 %

Table 2: Top 10 most powerful women CEOs of the year 2012
Source: *Economictimes.indiatimes.com*, 25 May, 2012, 12.43 AM IST, ET Bureau

Levels of Management	Brazil	India	Japan	Norway	U.S.A.
Entry level	16%	19%	13%	19%	40%
Middle management	13%	15%	9%	22%	26%
Senior management	16%	9%	8%	21%	28%
Boards of Directors	12%	8%	3%	29%	14%

Table 3: Women in Corporate Employment in Selected Countries by Job Level
Source: *The Corporate Gender Gap Report 2010 by the World Economic Forum*.

From the above table it is evident that in India small numbers of women are found in senior management level and in the corporate board rooms. The ground reality is that the careers of many Indian professional women languish at the middle management level. Still manager positions are stereotyped as male responsibility.

3.6. Initiatives of Some Exemplary Organizations for Breaking the Glass Ceiling:

Today, organizations which desire to excel compels to have a rich and diverse work team. Significance Gender diversity at workplace has been realised by the most of the organisations especially the service industry. Managing talent is recognised as the key to achieve human capital advantage over the competition in a global knowledge economy. One of the major challenges before modern organizations is to understand what they need to do in order to reduce the avoidable loss of their talented women employees. The best part of it is many merit-oriented organizations have started respecting the latent potential of women and their significance in the organisations. They have made radical changes in their HR policies to encourage women workforce and provide them with a more conducive work environment. Let us examine initiatives adopted by such exemplary organisations for smashing the glass ceiling.

3.6.1. Case of HSBC India

Under the esteemed leadership of Naina Lal Kidwai, HSBC India came out with mission to make HSBC 'The Best Place to Work for Women'. Gender diversity was quite encouraging at HSBC. Equal representation of men and women has been identified at the top and Female to Male at the frontline levels is 35:65. But it is quite astonishing to see less representation of women at middle level management. Effect of glass ceiling is found significant at these levels. Hence the company has adopted the following initiatives. (Aditya Narayan Singh Deo, 2009.)

1. Identifying Change Agents: A diversity committee has been constituted wherein representing various classes, ages, races, regions to appreciate diversity in the organizations will be representing.
2. Gender Diversity as well as Inclusive Leadership: To improve gender ratio at middle levels workshops are conducted for business heads. Business head's performance objectives carried annual diversity and inclusion outcome targets as a key metric.
3. Establishing the diversity supportive culture: Organising meetings with groups of people across levels, conducting exit interview analysis and holding candid conversations with new joiners on their experience, the trend was clear.
4. Flexible Working Policy: HSBC launched its flexible working policies like telecommuting, which could create a markable impact on the productivity of the bank. These flexible work arrangements not only benefited women, but also benefited men. Such policies made the employees also experienced a healthy work-life balance.

5. Women's Networking Forum as a solution-oriented platform for women to discuss challenges on a common business theme linked to education/leadership development/mentoring/career development Women's Networking Forums. Thus, HSBC is striving to become the most preferred employer for women in India.

3.6.2. Case of IBM India

In IBM India, the major focus area in diversity management is the progression of women in the organization. Increase in the representation of women in leadership and executive roles, and to ensure the brand image of the company as best employer for women. (Karine Schomer, 2010)

IBM India's Initiatives for breaking Glass Ceiling are as follows:

1. Gender sensitivity training for managers.
2. Quotas for women candidates in searches for senior positions
3. Special recruitment drive for Women
4. Welcoming women back to work after periods of leave
5. Formal mentoring programs
6. Pairing high potential women with senior executive sponsors
7. Flexible transfer policy
8. Home connectivity provided to most employees to allow work from home.
9. A Streamlined transport system with radio networks to address safety concerns.
10. Affinity networks are constituted to address women's workplace issues like work/family balance, recruitment and retention, leadership, mentoring and networking, skill development, relationship building, diversity goals, empowerment, and providing a women's perspective on company issues.

3.6.3. Case of Infosys

Infosys started its journey of gender diversity in 2003. It has established Women Inclusivity Network (IWIN), an internal peer counselling and advisory network for originating gender sensitive work environment. A separate office has been created exclusively to manage corporate diversity in 2006.

Women friendly HR initiatives of Women are as follows:

1. Gender sensitivity and diversity training programs are conducted to enable all the employees to be more sensitive to women situations and needs as women workforce in the company.
2. Creation of Diversity Councils in every business unit
3. Clear cut sexual harassment policy has been laid down by the company. Strict implementation of such policy is ensured
4. Work-life balance policies: flex hours, part-time work, telecommuting, sabbaticals, satellite office locations
5. Tracking promotions to ensure more transparency in corporate policies relating promotion. The Organizations should go in for gender audits.
6. Gender-balanced recruitment and promotion panels
7. Special skill building, training and mentoring programs for women
8. Peer and professional counselling for women
9. Women's affinity groups and portals. Affinity groups reduce the sense of isolation by offering opportunities to network with various people.
10. Encouraging women employees to participate in external women's forums.

3.6.4. Case of Deloitte

Deloitte has successfully integrated the development of women into its life blood. The vision is to drive marketplace growth and create a culture where the best women (and men) choose to be.

1. Organization believes in Gender equity and optimum utilisation of employee talents irrespective of gender has been realised as its HR strategy.
2. Company adopted flexible work arrangements through Virtual connectivity such as laptop computers, wireless computer cards and home internet allowed professionals to have the tools to work away from the office
3. Web communities that allow both women and men to network and share perspectives and ideas around career-life balance
4. Career-life fit options developed by individuals depending on their business and personal needs
5. Door-to-door pick and drop taxi transportation facilities exclusively for women
6. Women candidates for management and senior management roles are identified through Referral program.
7. Apprentice program which aligns young women with senior leadership
8. Tracking hiring and promotion numbers to focus on equity
9. External support of India women forums

3.6.5. Case of ICICI Bank

ICICI Bank is considered as women CEO factory by many Business analysts. There are very strong reasons behind such compliments. The bank's CEO K.V. Kamath spearheaded the scorching-paced growth with women executives occupying the key and vital divisions.

In mid-1980s the chairman and managing director of ICICI, Suresh S. Nadkarni insisted Lalita Gupte, to prove her potential in the organization. She came out as a high achiever and that created the equal opportunity culture at ICICI Group.

1. The company is clear in providing opportunities to its employees based on merit and performance.
2. The company believes in judging a person on his/her ability to perform rather than any other idiosyncratic factor.
3. Extended leave to deserving women who wants to devote time to their families at a critical juncture.
4. Sanction of study leave or leave to look after sick parents of women workforce.
5. More autonomy in implementing such strategies which allows meritocracy.

3.7. Strategies for Breaking Glass Ceiling

Few strategies which enable women in breaking glass are as follows:

- Organizations should go in for gender audits to ensure more transparency in corporate policies relating to employment, promotion, training.
- The Managers should be made more accountable for gender focused results and everyone should go through a gender sensitization process.
- Facilitating re-entry of women through crash training programs
- Strict implementations of laws prescribed exclusively for women.
- Provision of child care facilities at work place like crèches enables women to give their best in their profession.
- Conducting leadership training Programs explicitly for women managers.
- Companies should encourage its women employees to participate in programs that would hone their personality.

4. Conclusion

Indian companies are striving hard to break glass ceiling and utilise female talents to the fuller extent. Organisations are rigorously trying to achieve relative gender balance in the organizations they are making significant changes in their corporate cultures. Human resource professionals have a significant role to play—through organizational culture, workplace policies and practices, change management and workforce education—to develop women leaders at home and abroad. But this activism is not found in the manufacturing sector. Hence it is high time for them to realise significance of gender diversity. Gender diversity cannot be promoted in isolation by the businesses. Many business analysts and women who succeeded in breaking this glass ceiling believe that these are self created. Women would have to push themselves out of this self-imposed ceiling. If women are hard working and ambitious nothing can prevent them to get into the senior-level positions. Moreover many barriers for career of women are family imposed. As they climb the corporate ladder, many women discover that family is more important to them. So they quit playing senior roles in the management. The point to be noted here is that there are certain examples where families of ambitious women are fully supporting them in pursuing their careers. Thus, breaking glass ceiling is not difficult or impossible but it deserves some attention and no doubt it may transpire slowly.

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