



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES TO BREAK THE GLASS CEILING IN 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of glass ceiling is a much-discussed idea and accepted by every human being, yet it had prevailed and even today it continues to dominate the mind-set of both man and woman irrespective of the fact who he or she is, and what is the status. We usually relate the glass ceiling with the work-place, ignoring the fact that if the glass ceiling is none else than mental framework then family structure, social spectrum and peer groups witness the barriers in decision making particularly by women and hesitation to step out and take a bold lead at home and outside in the society and the work-place. The article attempts to place a mirror before a person who hesitates to make a strong move, takes a bold decision because of the mental barrier which constantly act as an impediment in the behaviour of the individual. Women predominate in the discussion because the ratio of men to women facing the Glass Ceiling.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "breaking the glass ceiling" refers to the invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching higher levels of leadership and achievement, particularly in professional environments, despite their qualifications and abilities. These barriers are often societal, cultural, or institutional and are not explicitly defined but are deeply ingrained in structures that favour men. The phrase "glass ceiling" highlights the fact that while women may see the upper levels of success and power, they often find it difficult or impossible to reach them due to these unseen obstacles. In this article an effort is made to introspect and describe comprehensively the challenges women experience in shattering this mental blockade called the "glass ceiling." It is a pointer to the challenges present in the society and confronted by people mainly women in the family, peer-group, neighbourhood, and the work-place. Undoubtedly there has been endless effort to bring more and more women in the work force but their roles as mother and wife prevent them from making big strides to success in their profession. In this regard feminists argue that traditional gender roles create many obstacles for working women both in the home and in the workplace. Female gender role was constructed as an opposite to an ideal male role, and helps to perpetuate patriarchy. This creates gender bias which result in the feeling of inequality in the minds of both men and women. For decades women have been fighting for equality. The feminist movement largely has

changed the traditionally accepted feminine gender role, yet it is strongly believed that much still needs to be done to bring total gender equality and change the perception of both the sexes. This idea of glass ceiling prevails in the mind set of working women because of this sense of inequality.⁵ There are many different impediments placed upon women that makes it difficult for them to attain a higher work status. With these very negative effects on women and their self-esteem, the glass ceiling has created an even larger problem than just in the work place. Most see the glass ceiling as only being in the work place, which is where it originally was intended for, it has spread to encompass the household and others as well. The barrier within the household has been seen as the difficulty a woman has of getting out of the household and accumulating a job. Not all women feel as though they are being suppressed in the household and many women choose to be in the household in which case the glass ceiling does not apply to them. The term only applies to those women that wish to be out in the work field but are unable to be. Because the glass ceiling also limits the opportunities of women in developing countries, the term has broadened and become an issue around the world. Societal expectations and cultural barriers often define women's roles in traditional domains like family, care giving, and homemaking, thus restricting their opportunities for career advancement. These stereotypes contribute to the glass ceiling, especially in male-dominated industries. Negative effects disturb their self-concept the glass ceiling has created an even

larger problem for women not just in the work place but also in other setups, particularly home and social circles. However, it cannot be ignored that whenever women could enhance their status in home and in the workplace, there were supports of men be they husbands, fathers, brothers, or friends, who enabled them to move ahead of others and create a space for themselves. This indicates that the role of a male member is important and imminent in helping his female partner to be so empowered to be a decision maker in the house and in the workplace. Shattering the glass ceiling is the ultimate steps which all fail. Men in the work force do reach the peak of their achievements and retire satisfied, for women it is not the same. Generally, they retreat after reaching a particular level for personal constraints.⁴ Number of studies have revealed that the work-pace is not Gender-friendly even today particularly in developing countries, including India for women. Stereotypes in the form of lower pay, limited opportunities for promotion, fewer leadership positions, and unequal access to networks of influence become critical for career advancement. Also, the absences of child care facilities for young mothers in many organizations compel them to end their growing career and stay at home. Moreover, those women who confront all challenges and reach the top, find to their dismay being alone having no friend or mentor who can guide or with whom she can share thoughts.⁷

Studies Discussed: There are numerous studies highlighting on the concept of shattering of glass ceiling and they are pointers to the limitations and the short comings prevailing for women in various situations. Prominent US researcher Dr. Carol Gallagher has advocated an approach to the glass ceiling which said that: "Instead of trying to break the glass ceiling, women need to find their own personal windows to climb through it." It is further suggested that the glass ceiling is often assumed to be relevant to women being recruited into senior management and executive levels. Studies have shown however that a range of factors operate to affect career progression at much earlier stages in women's working lives. In terms of career development, the first thing professional women need to be aware of is that the glass ceiling is something that they need to be conscious of at every stage of their working lives.¹ Another view suggests that the long-term solution is a cultural one both within the workplace and in the wider world outside. Shattering stereotypes of gender roles that perpetuate inequalities between men and women cannot be accomplished by single individuals or in the short term. However, as women continue to slowly break through into senior positions where they can effect organisational change it is more likely that shifts in the perceptions of women at work will occur.²

Jaya Kapoor while discussing about Empowerment of Women and Leadership Manager in Higher Education, keeping the Indian setting in mind described how women get entangled into various roles both personal and social She mentions that the challenge for women is threefold when must move up the ladder in Higher education institutions- personal, professional, and sexual. She explains that that if women must move up the ladder, they must come out of their comfort zones and make efforts to create or, if necessary, demand their system to help and appreciate their efforts to move up into more responsible positions. No doubt there are many researches on gender equality both at home and the work place but gaps are visible between the ground reality and the government policy Though women are stretching out to climb the ladder and reach heights

but the number is few as many prefer to choose the soft path for peace and harmony. Thus they are able to coordinate between their home front and office work Jaya Kapoor mentions that lot of women now entering into teaching positions at the entry level. But there is still a gap in the numbers of male and female in middle management positions like heads and deans and even fewer in higher management like vice chancellors, and directors. It is believed that even today globally men outnumber women at middle management level and more at higher management level. Similarly, we find studies which discuss about equal pay for men and women and parity shared by both basic facilities provided in the work place. In an article I mentioned about the hurdles that women police constables unlike their male counterparts. As ample of women constables were interviewed and they highlighted on the constraints and lack of facilities Regarding the psyche of the women constable it is vivid that no matter how much we talk about the gender equality and gender neutrality we cannot ignore that the gender bias prevails in the job environment If the psyche of the woman constable remains disturbed then how can the police organization provide a successful and effective service to the society. The need of the hour is that senior women police officers arrange regular meetings with the women constables and handle their problems.^{3,8} As per the authors, the lack of mentorship exists for women in the workforce. Women often face challenges in accessing mentorship from senior leaders, as most higher-ups in many industries are still men. This gap in mentorship and sponsorship can limit women's professional growth and hinder their chances of breaking through the glass ceiling.

DISCUSSION

In question of socio and economic participation of both men and women in the progress of the country. The status of any given section of population in a society is intimately connected with its economic position, which itself depends on rights, roles, and opportunities for participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. This does not. However, means that all development results in improving women's economic status. The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so if women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to house work, which is private. In a UN declaration on "Elimination of discrimination against women" in 1967, it was stated that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and the welfare of the family and society, prevents their participation on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and humanity.⁵ U.S. Labour Secretary Robert B. Reich mentioned in an Annual Conference on working women in USA, (1996) that twenty-five million working women do not have pension plans. That is nearly three out of every five women who work in the private sector. Besides more than half of retired men receive pension benefits other than Social Security. But less than a third of retired women do. He believed that there is really a glass ceiling.⁶ Undoubtedly with the demand for the empowerment of women the labour market has seen a significant change with more and more women joining the workforce yet the glass ceiling the invisible harrier- stands The pay gap between women and men still exists in most countries, Women are also

more likely than men to be found in the lower paid and least secure jobs, Unemployment rates have been always higher in case of women than men. Women employees in India are still fighting an uphill battle for level pegging, in areas such as equal pay for equal work. Vimla Patil expressed in Tribune that though it is commonly believed today that women have made the grade in many professions; that they have total freedom of opportunity. But most women are still left gazing at their goals and ambitions through an almost unbreakable glass ceiling. They can clearly see what they want, but the hurdles in achieving their goals seem insurmountable.⁹

CONCLUSION

Breaking the glass ceiling is an ongoing process, and while many women have achieved remarkable feats, the struggle continues for women around the world, including in India. The experiences of women working in different spheres, serve as powerful examples of how women can overcome obstacles to reach the highest levels of success. However, societal change, legal reforms, and a continued focus on gender equality are essential to ensure that the glass ceiling is finally shattered for all women, allowing them to realize their full potential across all facets of life.

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