A Study on Glass Ceiling and Related Metaphors

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Abstract: Glass ceiling is an invisible but real discriminatory barrier that prevents women and other minorities from rising to position of power and responsibility, as within a corporation. Such barriers exist due to implicit prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, age, sex, caste, and family, environment, political and religious factors. Although considered illegal but still such practices prevalent in most of the countries. The existence of glass ceiling is found in many countries. According to various reports, glass ceiling do exists in all sectors. Some of the sectors do not have any single women at leadership positions. This paper will explore the existence of glass ceiling and various metaphors developed along with it. This paper will also contains some studies on related metaphors of glass ceiling such as sticky floor, mommy track, glass escalator, glass cliff, queen bee and frozen middle.

Key words: Barrier, Women, Minorities, Discrimination, Top Management Positions.

INTRODUCTION

The word "glass ceiling" was coined in a 1986 wall street journal report on corporate women by Hymowitz and Schellhardt. It is a metaphor that used to represent an invisible barrier that keeps women and other minorities from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy (Sharma et al. 2011). These barriers faced by women who aspire to attain senior positions as well as higher salary levels in corporations, government, education and non-profit organization (lockwood, 2004). At the end of 2018, we have only five powerful women (as per the Forbes list), and these five brilliant ladies are ICICI Bank's MD & CEO Chanda Kochhar, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, executive director and CEO of HCL Enterprise, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, founder, Chairman and MD of Biocon, Shobhana Bhartia, Chairperson and Editorial Director, HT Media Ltd and Bollywood actress and global celebrity Priyanka Chopra (Panchal, 2017). On the contrary, USA has at least 48 women in this prestigious list.

Glass ceiling is a myth because it does not exist in reality but it is thinking of few people. Normally, feminist point to the supposed pay gap between men and women for doing the same level of task. But they neglect to factor in time off women take for maternity leave and life decisions many women make to go into less demanding careers to leave time for family. Correcting for those factors, there's virtual pay equality. Sometimes the greatest barriers we face are the ones we create for ourselves (Gupta, 2018). This might sound amazing but how many of us actually believe we are capable of enough to scale big heights. How many of us stop and actually ask ourselves: Am I capable of going the distance even if I am the only one who believes? But this is not the glass ceiling of the corporate world. This is the glass ceiling of our minds.

Glass ceiling is a reality because there are some women who are underestimated on the basis of age, family, religion, caste, legal and some environmental factors in spite of having good knowledge, experience and better understanding. In many big corporate organizations most of the top management positions are filled by men and

women are avoided to be promoted at higher level .only 10% of top managers of registered companies in India are women. There also a limitation of self confidence in women which leads to glass ceiling. Generally they do not fight for their rights, power and position. Today there are many more women in powerful positions of India; however, the glass ceiling is still very real.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper is descriptive in nature and attempt to explore the concept of glass ceiling along with some related metaphors. This study will also explore the reasons of prevalence of glass ceiling, impact of glass ceiling on organizations, and breach of glass ceiling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence of glass ceiling is not only found in India but also in many countries. Men and women practice different management styles. Successful women managers practice interactive leadership, encouraging participation in decision-making and motivating others by sharing information and power (Rosner, 1990). A survey Carried out of followers that rated women and men leaders on leaders' characteristics that produced a contradictory result. Female leaders were rated higher than males on the characteristics that are vital for an organization's growth and flexibility. Women leaders tend to have more idealized influence, inspirational influence, and intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration than their male counterparts (Avolio & Bass, 1994). The gender gap at different levels in an organization can only be filled on the grounds of ethical judgment: the principle of justice (Draulans, 2003). As per (Alkadry & Tower, 2006) the wage gap between genders ranged from $5,035 to $9,577 in US workforce. This indicates that gender plays a major role in salaries of public officials in similar positions. Different employers and occupations have different sets of wages between men and women. Apart from this, In India discrimination in wages is found in self-financing institutions rather in government institutions it is at par (Sharma, 2011). A study from Pakistan, cultivating awareness about the work force diversity, equal employing opportunities and effectual strategy to reduce the glass ceiling effect that women faces in the organizations (Imran, 2013). The presence of glass ceiling is not limited to a particular sector/ organization/ industry. It is found to be present in every sector whether it is education sector, corporate sector, banking sector, profit or non-profit organization (Yadav, 2014). A study also reveal that men and women leads differently, men view leadership as leading and women via leadership as facilitating (Jarmon, 2014). It is found that women confront the glass ceiling syndrome much more than men. Organization should evaluate leadership based on its merit, not based on the gender of the individual leader (Katuna, 2014). The presence of glass ceiling is also found at every level in an organization. As per (Sever, 2016) Gender-based discrimination in promotions is more intense at higher levels, but it is felt in every stage of business life. Few studies also reveals that, there is very less representation of women at higher positions or leadership positions (Banker, 2017). Such barriers exist due to implicit prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, age, sex, caste, and family, environment, political and religious factors.

Although considered illegal but still such practices prevalent in most of the countries (Gupta, 2018). On the basis of the literature review sufficient evidences of the existence of glass ceiling are worked out. Most of the studies are focused on the grounds of discrimination, leadership effectiveness but none of the study clarifies who can make a better leader male or female. So, further research can be done to find out whether male or female could make a better leader.

Glass ceiling

The "glass ceiling" is one of the most compelling factors for analyzing inequalities and discrimination between men and women in the workplace. (Morrison et al., 1987) "A transparent barrier that kept women from rising above a certain level in corporations. It applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women"

Here are some related metaphors of Glass Ceiling:

Table: 1 indicating some metaphors related with Glass Ceiling

Glass Escalator	Sticky Floor
Glass Cliff	Queen Bee
Mommy Track	Frozen Middle

1. **Glass Escalator:-** Glass Escalator is a metaphor that can be defined as how men are joining field that were previously occupied by women, such as nursing, elementary school teaching, librarianship and social work, and within these job fields, women lag behind their male counterparts, as men are offered more promotions than women (Williams, 1992). Glass escalator in favor of men in female-dominant occupation such as in schools, where women have mostly occupied the positions of teachers, men are taking the higher positions in school system as dean and principals (Broner, 2013). The upward mobility implied by the glass escalator is not uniformly available to all men who do "women's work" rather it is a racialized concept and a gendered one and considers the implications of this for future studies of men in feminized occupations (Wingfield, 2009). Addendum to this, glass escalator takes underrepresented men on an upwardly mobile internal career path at a speed that their female colleagues can hardly enjoy (Hultin, 2003). Various studies confirms that along with glass ceiling the glass escalator also keep women from reaching top managerial positions even if in women dominated field.

2. **Sticky Floor: -** Sticky floor is a metaphor with two interpretations. Firstly, it has been used to keep women at entry level jobs with low pay. Secondly, women self-sabotage their careers and are responsible for self-imposed barriers in workplaces (Smith et. al, 2012). As per the analysis on gender wage gap in private and public sector in Australia, a strong glass ceiling effect is detected only in the private sector (Kee, 2016). Low-wage earners who have had relatively less education, working as production workers in non-state sectors, may face aggravated pay discrimination, because private employers are less regulated in compensation practice, but more importantly because there is a plentiful labor supply of male unskilled

workers, so unskilled female workers can be easily replaced (Chi, 2008). The driving forces behind the sticky floor effect on the endowments side include females having lower level of education, less likelihood of being CPP members and being concentrated in lower paying occupations, and on the returns side having lower returns to their job tenure, other labour market experience, and a greater negative effect of family responsibilities on female wages (Xiu, 2014). All the studies confirms that there exist a pay discrimination on the basis of gender, even if they work in same parameters.

3. **Glass cliff: -** The term was coined in 2004 by British professors Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam of University of Exeter, United Kingdom. The glass cliff is the phenomenon of women in leadership roles, such as executives in the corporate world and female political election candidates, being likelier than men to achieve leadership roles during periods of crisis or downturn, when the chance of failure is highest. A study successfully proved that there is more chances for female to break through the glass ceiling and become member of corporate board of director in times of economic crisis than economic prosperity (Sun et al., 2014). One of the study revealed that during a period of overall stock-market decline those companies who appointed women to their boards were more likely to have experienced consistently bad performance in the preceding five months than those who appointed men (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

4. **Queen Bee:** - Queen Bee syndrome was first defined by G.L. Staines, T.E. Jayaratne, and C. Tavris in 1973. It describes a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are female. An alternate definition describes a queen bee as one who has succeeded in her career, but refuses to help other women do the same. Queen bees limit opportunities for their female subordinates by denying the existence of gender bias when occupying high positions and by distancing themselves from other women, queen bees implicitly legitimize women's low organizational status and are unlikely to inspire their female subordinates as role models (Derks et. al, 2011). A study in UK found that approximately 70 per cent had been the victim of either workplace bullying or covert undermining by a female boss (Harvey, 2018). However, Most of the studies fail to prove the existence of queen bee syndrome in some organizations. The evidence from a study suggests that the queen bee phenomenon may be a myth; instead, of keeping subordinate women at bay, women leaders who are afforded much managerial discretion behave in a benevolent manner toward subordinate women. So, the term "Regal Leader" instead of "Queen Bee" is more appropriate characterization of women in top positions of power (Arvate et. al, 2018). This phenomena is yet not proved accurately.

5. **Mommy Track: -** "Mommy Track" is a term used to describe women who simply disregard their career and professional duties in order to satisfy the needs of their families. This phenomenon is yet to be explored. So, more research can help in delineating more about this metaphor

6. **Frozen Middle: -** The term was popularized by a Harvard Business Review article titled "Middle Management Excellence". Due to the growing proportion of women to men in the workforce, however,

the term "frozen middle" has become more commonly ascribed to the aforementioned slowing of the careers of women in middle management. Very few studies have been done on this metaphor.

Reasons of prevalence of glass ceiling:

There are various forces such as socio-cultural, legal, personal, and organizational that affects a woman's rise to the upper level of an organization. Theoretically, every woman is much more capable of reaching the top of her organization. A high level of sustained self-confidence and emotional quotient, persistence and patience, the right mentors at various stages of their career, an extremely supportive family and a little bit of luck or opportunity can help a woman to break the glass ceiling barrier.

Traditionally, the glass ceiling was a concept applied to women and some minorities as no matter how qualified or experienced, they simply were neither given opportunities nor made aware of, to further advance their careers.

Some of the reasons of prevalence of glass ceiling in India

- Age factor
- Family – peer, children and emotional factor
- Legal factor
- Caste, culture and religion factor
- Personal – strength, experience and knowledge factor
- Political factor
- Organizational factor
- Environmental factor

Impact of glass ceiling on organization:

We see more women in the industries like publishing, education, entertainment, healthcare, etc. and negligible representation in defense and aerospace, banking, and engineering. Self-selection could be an important reason for this gap. In business administration, although women are a majority, there are very few women in disciplines such as accounting or finance. Having an advanced degree in these two business disciplines is a stepping stone to the upper position of the organization.

In India, women are entering professions that were once dominated by men. In sectors such as advertising, banking, engineering, civil services, manufacturing, and the civil services, there is an exponential growth in the number of women. One major reason for this development could be the change that has occurred at the grassroots level. In absolute numbers, India has one of the largest pools of female students in engineering and IT in the world.

- **Positive impact of glass ceiling on organization**

There are many organizations in India where there are no any women at higher level positions. These organizations generally restrict women to develop their skills and knowledge. But sometimes it is in the favor of women because they have to leave time for family, limited task at work place, less demanding career as compare

to men and fewer burdens of task leads to stress free job. This will help in maintaining the quality of the work done by women and also they will gain specialization in a specific field. Thus, glass ceiling sometimes represent positive outcomes for the organizations but this will harm the reputation of the organization as there are no any women at higher position.

- **Negative impact of glass ceiling on organization**

Glass ceiling adopted by any organization may negatively affect its goodwill. Now day's women are also getting out of this myth by exploiting opportunities available. They are developing slowly in the environment provided. Organizations are now competing in an advanced global environment which demands for greater adaptability and a superior combination of technical and managerial skills for survival. Women having with strong technical skills, collaboration and communication skills, cooperative nature, persistence, humility, tolerance, nurturing skills, negotiation and conflict resolution, willingness to learn and ability to multitask are quite suitable for growing organizations.

The challenges that women face when climbing the corporate ladder demand skills to cope up with uncertainty and to adapt changes. A woman's leadership style, often perceived to be more effective, inspires confidence among her peers and subordinates, and especially among the other women. Other fact is a woman plays multiple roles in their personal lives which sharpen their interpersonal, conflict resolution ability and other leadership skills. This combination of adaptability, interaction with peers and subordinates, and an ability to nurture and inspire can help an organization to succeed. Thus, there should be the availability of women at higher level in the organization because they are having different point of view regarding things and the decisions made by them are always in the favor of others.

Breaching of glass ceiling:

Companies should implement the following changes to combat the ceiling:

1. Organization must develop career planning policies for women including mentoring and leadership development programs as part of corporate strategy.
2. Identify high-potential women early on in their careers, involve them in planning and decision making process and provide them with opportunities to direct and lead high profile projects so that they build their competencies and skills to reach to the top level.
3. Create an environment in the company that is comfortable for women and which brings confidence in them so that they may easily take decision as and when any situation arises. This will improve their decision taking capability and also make them capable to take initiative.
4. Make accommodations to women to enable them to manage work and family side by side.
5. Have an open communication policy which may be formal and which invites more and more suggestions.
6. Consciousness among women managers to make mentorship of other women one of their primary responsibilities.

We are not in favor of quotas or reservations for women in educational programs or in companies. Even if only a small percentage of women come up the ladder through special breaks, it will be assumed that the rest of us who came up the hard way got those breaks as well. IMF managing director and CEO Christine lagarde visted India in the year 2014 and observed the presentation of women at higher positions is far less than men. She recommended to appoint at least one female director in BOD's. After that it becomes mandatory for all listed firms too.

CONCLUSION

Women have often seen in the traditional role of the homemaker who takes care of the children. But with the growing need for roles to converge, we see more and more men taking up housework and child care. Single men and women need to take care of their work life balance as well. Many corporate houses are recognizing this trend and providing initiatives to cope with work-life balance. However, female employees who are managing work and family simultaneously were not considered appropriate for promotions. When women moved out of their traditional roles, a second wave of feminism in the form of super womanhood (a term coined by Betty Friedan) took shape. There's a common belief that women excel in gender specific roles. The leadership styles to management decisions of women are seen as distinct from those of men. Further research is required for the related metaphors of glass ceiling. Glass cliff, glass escalator and sticky floor attracted the attention of many researchers. Apart from these metaphors more research is required to prove Queen Bee syndrome and on mommy track concept.

From a corporate perspective, women still face gender pay gap. There's a common belief that men worldwide desire top jobs more often than women. Even if the glass ceiling does exist, it does not impact job satisfaction. According to popular belief, women do not negotiate or hard bargain as well as men.

In the end, glass ceilings exist in myth and reality. Sometimes the glass ceiling is a figment of our imagination whereas at other times the glass ceiling is a hard reality.

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