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GLASS CEILING EFFECT OF WOMEN IN REACHING TOP POSITIONS IN INDIA- A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

India is playing an important role in the global economy and skill is in high demand. Indian women with education are a major provenance of talent. The increasing gender inclusivity in Indian executive ranks now provides a pathway for change for Indian women, even though Indian institutions have not yet properly utilized this talent pool. Although women are fairly represented in the workforce, they are underrepresented in senior management roles, a phenomenon known as the "glass ceiling." This is incredibly powerful and prevents women from rising through the managerial ranks. Women are underrepresented in a number of areas, including politics, education, the IT industry, banking, and higher education. The gender wage gap, the glass ceiling effect, and women's roles in the BRIC nations are also highlighted. It also focuses on women's role in BRICs countries, Gender Wage Gap and the Glass ceiling effect on women and organizational, social and individual barriers, and suitable measures to break the glass ceiling effect.

KEYWORDS: Gender Wage Gap in India, Women in Politics, Women in Education, Women in IT and Banking, Women in Universities

INTRODUCTION

India is a major player in the world economy today, and skill is in great demand. Indian women with education are the main source of talent. The increasing gender inclusivity in Indian executive ranks now provides a direction for change for Indian women, even though Indian institutions have not yet properly utilized this talent bank. Due to their extensive unpaid labor, which sometimes goes unnoticed and unaccounted for in GDP, women make significant contributions to economic welfare through domestic chores and childrearing. Women devote more time to un waged employment, which limits their ability to engage in the job market. Women often devote 4 times to childcare and two times to home chores as their male counter parts do, which frees up time for men to engage in salaried position.



As per the economic graph report from Linked in and Quantum Hub overall women representation in India increased from 24% in 2016 to 27% in 2024, but senior leadership roles remain slow 17% to 19% during 2016-2024. As per the World Bank 16% of women employees are in senior and middle management positions in India in the year 2022.

As per the SPJIMR, white paper Enhancing women leadership in India Inc only 1.8% of Fortune 500 companies in India have a board with at least 3 women directors, while it requires 20% as per the norms. There are only 1.6% of Managing Directors and CEOs in Fortune 500 companies.

Across the Fortune 1000 companies in India, just 3.2% are led by women Managing Director or CEOs. In IT Industry, none of the 54 corporate firms in the NSE-1000 index had a female CEO.

The percentage of women in managerial positions is steadily rising throughout the globe. The reasons include the rise in women's education, shifting socio cultural attitudes, growing knowledge of women's rights, and the necessity for more income.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

According to the study “Enhancing women Leadership in India Inc” jointly conducted by Fortune India and SP Jain Institute of Management and research sheds light on the persistent gender gap in leadership roles within Indian Industries. The study identified several root causes contributing to this gender disparity, 30 to 40 percentages of women employees quit the workforce by the time they enter middle management. This is the time when they get married or have a family and they take maternity leave, after this getting again the same job is challenging and inherent biases prevalent in corporate mindset.

According to the Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) 2025 report women account for only 26% of the workforce and 8% of CEOs being women despite progress in flexible policies and inclusive practices.

Mckinsey& Company Report 2025, reveals a significant gender gap, with women holding only 17% of C-Suite roles and 20% of board positions in India, despite relatively higher representation at entry levels. The report pointed out that low recruitment, high attrition and limited career advancement as major hurdles for women in corporate India. The report highlights that removing this gap requires intentional efforts, as gender equity is a strategic imperative for India’s economic growth.

A Conceptual Study on Glass Ceiling of Women Professionals in India, by Dr. S.Uma Mageswari, highlighted how the glass ceiling affects women’s advancement in the workforce, diversity within the



organization and economic expansion. This study also suggests tactics to bring breakthrough the Glass Ceiling, like female leadership projects, corporate policies and societal actions.

“A study on Glass Ceiling effects on women at workplaces in Tamilnadu” by Rihaash.T, opined that women are seemingly in workforce for decades, but many still feel that, there is unwritten rules of the work place and masculine norms are favor of men. It is the battle of earlier ideology in India and women need to constantly battle to fight such evil myths. Thus, the glass ceiling effect still exists within the society.

“Glass Ceiling in India: A Reality for Women” by Dr. Kumar Ratnesh 2023, highlighted that the Glass ceiling exists in various industries. Men occupy the executive positions in corporations and other positions in power. Psychological factors gender bias discrimination are the reasons that glass ceiling is still very much present in the workforce.

“A Study on the Impact of Glass Ceiling Effect on women in the Higher Education Sector in India” by Rushi Arora, Anuradha, R. Tiwary, 2023, reveals that Glass Ceiling is indeed present in the workforce place, as evidenced by gender inequality in promotions, pay recognition and other social cultural factors. Affirmative action and diversity initiatives played an important role in providing window of opportunity for women who aspire to hold upper leadership positions. The study also highlighted that HR Training and policies required diverse hiring pools and more diversity in the composition of hiring communities.

Samistha Nandy, Arnab Bhaskar, and Sovonjit Ghosh's article, "Corporate Glass Ceiling: An Impact on Indian Women Employees." The glass ceiling effect, often known as the gender diversity issue in organizations, is the main topic of this essay. It also discusses cultural prejudices, gender preconceptions, and the strategies that all organizations should employ to support and advance qualified women into respectable and leadership roles. Despite possessing excellent academic credentials and a wealth of knowledge, quality, and efficiency, women are underrepresented in top executive roles due to the glass ceiling issue.

“Glass Ceiling for women in IT Sector”, Shalini Suryanarayana, states that the glass ceiling manifests only when women reach high enough to encounter it. But incipient is the slippery slope that they have to tenuously climb before they can ever aspire to the ceiling.

Women are still underprivileged in managerial positions in India as well as the world countries. Most of the women work in lower and middle management roles, and there are a meager number of women in high management. Some of the studies have focused on the glass ceiling effect on women rather

than global comparisons, the gender wage gap, or the presence of women on boards of directors. Hence the present topic is taken with the following objectives.

Objectives of the study:

- i. To study women's role in BRICS Countries.
- ii. To highlight the Global Wage Gap and Gender Wage disparities in India by Sector Wise.
- iii. To examine the role of women in different fields such as IT, Banking sector, Education, Politics and Universities.
- iv. To appraise the representation of Women in Top Management in various fields.
- v. To offer suitable measures to shatter the Glass Ceiling.

Research Methodology of the Study:

The study focuses on a thorough analysis of secondary data collected from books, national and international journals, and articles from numerous websites that addressed different facets of women in various fields in India.

Global Scenario:

India's economy, which is among the fastest-growing in the area, obviously does not transfer into larger and more influential positions for women, who obtain significantly fewer top jobs than women in the BRIC nations and India's Asian neighbors.

Table-1
Women's role in BRICS Countries

Country	Participation in labour force to the total labour(in %)	Board Rooms (in %)	Paid Maternity Leaves (in days)	Parliaments (in %)
Brazil	53.2	15.9	120	17.5
Russia	55.2	10	140	16.4
India	31.2	18.3	182	15.2
China	59.9	15.1	158	26.5
South Africa	52.9	34.9	120	45.9
Egypt	15.3	13.4	90	27.5
United Arab Emirates	53.5	9.5	60	50
Iran	13.6	---	270	5.6
Indonesia	52.5	9.7	90	21.6



Ethiopia	57.4	---	120	41.3
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Source: Gender Statistics, Bricswomen.com, March 2025

Among the BRIC countries, 59.9% of female are involving in work force in China, 57.4% in Ethiopia, 55.2% in Russia 53.2 percent in Brazil and 31.2 percentage of women are participating in labour workforce in India.

Women participation in parliaments has expanded in some countries significantly. The countries such as UAE, South Africa, Ethiopia have made progress, with women achieving 50% , 45.9% , and 41.3% representation in their parliaments respectively.

Women parliamentarians are 26.5% in China , 15.2% in India and least representation in Iran with 5.6%. Women’s involvement in public decision making enriches policy making quality and promotes greater social inclusiveness. South Africa leads among BRICs countries with women holding 34.9% of board positions. Where as in India it is 18.3% .Iran is in leading position with 270 days of paid maternity leave provided to the women ,in India it is 182 days and in China it is 158 days.

Global Wage Gap

According to Global Gender Pay Gap Report, 2025, gender gap in India is 131th place out of 148 nations with a score of 64.1% in 2025. Bangladesh placed is 24, Bhutan 119, Nepal 125, Srilanka 130 and Pakistan 148th position remains lowest in worldwide gender gap.

The wage gaps in various countries are as follows. Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden and Germany are the best performers in 2023.

The wage gap of women in the Middle East and North Africa is very low. Because they are well educated and explains the relatively tiny salary discrepancies in these regions. The salary differences are noticed in a number of countries.

Everybody should have the right to equal pay for equal work. However, even in industrialized countries there are large difference in salaries by gender, even within the same occupation Japan and South Korea has the worst gender pay gap in the world, -women earn 30% less than man. In the US – Women earn 23% less than men. The discrimination of wage gaps is due to the women decide to interrupt their career after child birth.

**Table-2
Gender Wage Gap in India**

Male	Rs.12048
Women	Rs.8034
Difference of Wage	Rs. 4014

Source: An analysis of PLFS2020, sattva.co.in

The above table-2 reveals about the Gender Wage Gap in a India. As per the study of PLFS the Gender Gap in India stood at 33%, where men earned Rs.12048 and women earned Rs.8034 ,Rs.4014 more in comparison to women.

**Table-3
Sector Wise Wage Gap**

S.No.	Sector	Wage Difference (in Rs.)	S.No.	Sector	Wage Difference (in Rs.)
1	Senior official and Managers	8374	9	Elementary occupations	2770
2	Professionals	3278	10	Casual Labor	2713
3	Technicians and Associate Professionals	8238	11	Salaried	4089
4	Clerks	1622	12	Self Employed	5989
5	Service Worker, shop and market sale	4993	13	Agriculture and Allied Sectors	3812
6	Skilled and agricultural workers	3999	14	Manufacturing and Constructions	5904
7	Craft and related trade workers	6258	15	Services	4435
8	Plant and Machinery operators	5256	16	Trading	6020

Source :An analysis of PLFS 2020, sattva.co.in

The Sector wise wage gap is shown in table -3. According to PLFs , the Gender Pay Gap exists across key sectors, Senior officials and Managers it is Rs.8475 followed by Technicians and Associate professionals with Rs.8238.The least gender gap is observed in clerks with Rs.1622.

A meager percentage of top CEO positions are held by women, despite the fact that a few are generating headlines when they break through. The smaller number of women are in higher levels of an organization's hierarchy. The vast majority of Indian boardrooms are still off-limits to women, with the exception of a few like ICICI Bank, HSBC, and Biocon.

Table-4
Top Ten Women’s Employer’s in India

Organisation	Total Employees	Women employees	Percentage of women	Rank
Shahi Exports	1,13,000	70,000	61.94%	I
Infosys	3,37,034	1,24,569	36.96%	II
TCS	5,82,163	2,14,098	36.77%	III
Wipro	2,34,000	82,595	35.29%	IV
Tech Mahindra	1,48,731	51,163	34.4%	V
ICICI	1,30,957	43,233	33.01%	VI
HCL	2,26,300	66,268	29.28%	VII
HDFC	2,20,339	55,610	25.23%	VIII
Reliance Industries Ltd	4,03,303	74,317	18.42%	IX
Quess Corporation Services	6,00,000	95,725	15.95%	X

Source: Data compiled from the individual websites of the companies

According to the Burgundy Private Harun India 500 report, women occupy 17% of Board positions, with 13 women became leaders, 742 women directors appointed to company boards during 2024-2025. Annapurna Devi (Women and Child Development Minister) introduced the theme of Viksit Bharat with Nari Shakti, reinforcing the country’s shift from women’s development as part of the Viksit Bharath 2047 vision. Table-4, states the Top Ten Women’s Employer’s in India. It shows that Shahi Exports is in leading position with 61.94% of women in total employees with 70000, Infosys placed in second rank with 36.96% ,with women employees of 124,569.

Companies Act 2013:

The revised Companies Act, was approved in August 2013, enacted that at least one women should be appointed in board of directors. It is mandatory for all listed companies and other public limited companies to appoint were given until 31st March 2015 to comply with this legislative provision. This provision was incorporated in the law to further promote diversity in Indian company boardrooms.

As the Companies Act made it mandatory, most of the companies are appointing the women who are already a board of director for other company. Vast majority of companies are not appointing independent women director. Hence it became a mere farce.

Women’s representation in Top Management in Different Fields- an Assessment:

A. Information Technology:

IT industry plays an important role country’s economy with software and services exports. This sector is fastest-growing category at 18.4%, reaching USD 1,118.4 million in FY 2025. For young Indian professionals, the IT sector is a major source of employment.

IT industry in India is employing 5.8 million professionals during FY 2024-2025, contributing to 7.4% to the India’s GDP and it contributes 45% of total exports in India. The female workforce in this sector is 1.92 million, they are contributing 33.1% to the industry.

The Indian software industry is still almost exclusively controlled by men, in spite of these businesses support gender equality in their organizations.

**Table-5
Women Board of Directors in IT Sector**

S.No	Company name	Board of Directors		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Infosys. Ltd.	12	2	14
2	Wipro Ltd.	7	2	9
3	HCL Tech Ltd.	6	5	11
4	Tech Mahindra	6	1	7
5	LTIMindtree	9	1	10
6	Cognizant	11	3	14
7	Oracle Financial Services Software	6	3	9
8	Persistent Systems	9	2	11



9	Coforge	5	1	6
10	Total	81	21	102

Source: Compiled from Websites (2026)

In top 10 largest IT companies in India, the amount of women Board of Directors in the year 2026 is 21 out of 102 Directors. The overall number of male directors are 81. Women share is 20.58% only. HCL Tech Ltd 5 members, Cognizant and Oracle Financial Services Software is having 3 women Directors. Infosys, Wipro Ltd, Persistent Systems each is 2 and Tech Mahindra, LTIMindtree, Coforge is having each 1 Board of Directors.

B. Banking Sector:

Due to its high salary and status, the banking industry is highly appealing to women. Additionally, it is a desk job, no need to travel regularly for official business. Despite the seeming higher amount of women employed by foreign and private sector banks, their combined share of the banking industry is only 27%. Together, PSU's share is 27% of women's employment, but private sector banks, with foreign banks holding the greatest percentage at 31.6%.

Gopinath, RBI Deputy Governors, MeeraSanyal, CEO, ABN Amro, KalpanaMorparia, CEO, JPMorgan Chase and Co, ManishaGirotra, Chairperson, UBS Warburg India, FalguniNayar, Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Capital, Arundathi Bhattacharya (SBI), Ranjana Kumar (NABARD), Shanti Ekambaram (Kotak Mahindra Bank), Usha Ananthasubramanian (Bhartiya Mahila Bank). At ICICI Bank, in particular, created opportunities for women to grow. Other banks and financial institutions also did their bit. ChandaKochhar of ICICI Bank, Shikha Sharma of Axis Bank, Renu Sud Karnad HDFC, Naina Lal Kidwai of HSBC India, Vedika Bhandarkar of Credit Suisse, and Ashu Suyash of Fidelity India, Madhabi Puri Buch (SEBI Chief) are more prominent in India.

Compared to PSU's, private sector banks account for the majority of these success stories. These success tales, however, pale in comparison to those of men. In addition to achieving the top positions, these women encouraged young girls to have ambitious dreams. Women typically work as (assistant) managers, sales managers, customer service representatives, or accountants in banking and finance. Women frequently land jobs with titles that don't really provide them much power or supervisory authority.

C. Women’s Enrollment in Education:

**Table-7
Women’s Enrolment in different Disciplines**

Programme	2020-21		Programme	2020-21	
	Total Students In Lakhs	Women’s in %		Total students In Lakhs	Women’s in %
MBA	6.09	43.1	BA	96.55	52.9
MSC	7.84	62.5	B.COM	43.22	48.5
B.TECH	23.2	28.7	B.SC	49.12	52.2
PG in Social Sciences	9.41	56.5	B.Ed	13.7	66
PG in Sciences	6.79	61.3	B.E	14.9	71.5
P h.D in Engineering &Technology	0.56625	33.3	Ph.D in Science (Maths,Chemistry, Physics,Zoology)	0.486	48.8

Source: AISHE Survey 2020-21

According to the Government Report All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) March 7,2025 data 43.3 million girl students are currently enrolled in higher education institutions in India.

Women’s Enrolment in different Disciplines is presented in Table –7. Women’s enrollment in B.Eis highest with 71.5%, followed by B.Ed with 66% and M.Sc, with 62.5%. The female share of enrolment is in case of Ph.Din Science (Maths, Chemistry, Physics, Zoology is 48.8%.

The female’s enrolment is much lower in B.Tech and Ph.D in Engineering and Technology with 28.7%, 33.3% respectively. This indicates gender disparity in enrolment of students in different disciplines.

Table-8
Student, Faculty and Staff- Gender representation in India

Indicator	Total Population	Male		Female	
		Number	Percentage	Number	percentage
Share of Population	147.67 crores	76.11 crores	51.5%	71.55 crores	48.5%
Share of student enrollment	4.33crores	2.26 crores	53.7%	2.07 crores	46.2%
Share of teaching staff at school	1 crore	60,10,000	60.1%	39,90,000	39.9%
Share of non-teaching staff at school	1,61,963	82,210	50.75%	79,753	49.24%

Source: ASHE report2026, Ministry of Education Plus report 2024-25

Table-8, shows the Student, Faculty and Staff Gender representation in India. The total population in India is 147.67 crores as a 2026, in these women are 71.55 crores with 48.5% of representation. The share of women student enrollment is 46.5%, whereas women teaching staff is 39.9% and male teaching staff is 60.1% and share of non-teaching staff is 49.24% in female and 50.75% in male. This table reveals that teaching staff and non-teaching staff share of girls is less than that of male staff.

D. Women in Universities:

Table-9
Women in all Universities in India

S.No	Designation	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
1	Vice Chancellors	994	89.22%	120	10.77%	1,114
2	Registrars	1,107	99.38%	7	0.62%	1,114
3	Professors	22,129	79.89%	5570	20.11%	27,699



4	Associate Professors	17,696	72.96%	6,558	27.03%	24,254
5	Assistant Professors	41,771	62.91%	24,622	37.09%	66,393

Source: Compiled from Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India 2024, education.gov.in, Association of Indian Universities (AIU), new Indian express.com

The data compiled from 56 central universities, 479 state universities, 124 deemed to be universities, 455 private universities as on 2026 as per UGC. There are 1,114 universities under UGC, out of which 120 universities have women VCs, it is only 10.77% across the country. Women VCs, Registrars often lead with a strong sense of purpose, championing initiatives that support gender, equity, student wellbeing, inclusive policies and social responsibility.

Professors 20.11%, Associate Professors 27.03%, but Assistant Professors are 37.09%. This data reveals that the women in top positions like VCs and Registrar in the Universities are a meager percentage only. This shows the gender disparity in education, that to top positions.

E. Women in Law:

Men dominate the higher –paying and higher –ranking jobs. Only 1 out of 34 sitting Supreme Court Judges are women, Justice Nagarathnain 2025 and 14% of High Court Judges are occupied by women.

F. Women in Politics:

India, the world’s fast-growing economy, has now only 74 (13.6%) women MPs out of 543 MPs in Loka Sabha, in 18th elections in 2024. There are only 42(17%) women MPs in the 245 members Rajya Sabha. The number is even less in state assemblies. On an average only 9% of MLAs (Legislative Assembly Members) are women. No state assembly crosses 20% women legislatures. Chhattisgarh has the highest MLAs with 18%, Himachal Pradesh has 1, and Mizoram have 0 women MLA.

Women face barriers in politics such as patriarchal norms, limited resource assess. Despite the legal reforms, women in politics are under representation. It undermines democratic principles and gender equality. There is an urgent need for reforms in enacting new acts relating to women, reservation policies and cultural shift to ensure equitable political participation.



According to UN Women publication on women in leadership, globally 21% are women Prime Ministers and 26% are women Parliamentarians. As on 2025 year, 32 women serving as Heads of the states or Government across 29 countries. Only 27 countries in the globe are led by women.

Strengths of Indian Women:

The capacity to network with coworkers, the capacity to recognize and comprehend circumstances, strong sense of devotion, loyalty, and commitment to their organizations, the capacity to multitask, Collaborative work style: respect others' opinions, request their feedback, abilities to handle crises, Information sharing readiness (interactive leadership style), relationship sensitivity (compassion, empathy, understanding), and gender-neutral behavior.

Suitable Measures to Shatter the Glass Ceiling Effect:

The right of female to work alongside of men, (article 41) including equal access to employment, (right to equality articles 14-18) pay, training and promotion is recognized as a fundamental human right and an economic right.

- i. Create regulations that foster a workplace that is welcoming to women.
- ii. Create training initiatives for women, including leadership development, career counseling, and mentorship.
- iii. Encourage awareness campaigns that emphasize the importance of female management.
- iv. Ask female employees for their opinions on policy, promotions, and performance reviews.
- v. Provide accommodations for women in areas like need-based postings.
- vi. Make a sincere effort to hire, advance, and include women in the yearly company plan.
- vii. Organisations need to redefine and restructure the systems.
- viii. By fostering inclusivity reforms, workforce cultures, closing educational and skill gaps and cultural shifts are required.
- ix. Flexible parental leave policies led to improvements in female workforce engagement.
- x. Organisations should conduct leadership programmes, mentorship programmes, flexible work arrangement and transparent promotion processes.
- xi. Women should develop networks, and take help when need.
- xii. Women should be very patient and persistent in order to shatter the glass ceiling, it takes time, effort and perseverance.

CONCLUSION:

Globally, women are going through a significant transformation. In practically every field now, including defense and cooking, women share the podium with males. To be competitive, Indian



corporations require skill. In India, women are generally underutilized as managers. Support from upper management is crucial for women to advance in managerial positions.

The remarkable quality of women managers is their adeptness in balancing various responsibilities. Their multitask is the best trait. Additionally, women managers have a hallmark identity and set of abilities, intuitive perspectives when compared to males, they are more capable of handling contradictions, tolerating more, and producing far more.

The lower cadres continue to be dominated by women. Most of the Indian boardrooms are still off-limits to women. In the Indian companies women will hold about five percentages of the board seats on boards of directors in 2026.

As per the Russell 3000 index, Norway placed in the position with 45%, in Board seats held by women, in USA, it is 34%, China 14% and India 4.7%. Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions consistently have the lowest representation of women on company board rooms. However, these CEO's are from the private sector banks only. The percentage of Women Board of Directors IT industry in India in top ten IT companies are 21 seats are occupied by women out of 102 with a 20.58% only.

The women students enrollment in the educational institutions and Central Universities and State Universities, Deemed Universities and Private Universities in various programmes are increasing considerably. In spite of this, the top most positions such VCs filled with women in all universities in India as on 2026 as per UGC is 120 out of 1114 positions across all Universities in India. It is only 10.77% across the country. The women Registrars are only 7, with 0.62% only in 2024.

This shows the Glass Ceiling effect on women in these sectors, that to top positions.

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