



# CRACKING OF THE GLASS CEILING IN THE INDIAN BANKING SECTOR

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## ABSTRACT

*Glass Ceiling is a well known term amongst the women workforce in the banking sector which functions as invisible hiccups that the women encounter in their career path hindering both their progress and success. The Indian banking sector which remained largely male-dominated have witnessed in the recent years with a change in their workforce demographics. Even though women bankers are remarkably advancing in the hierarchical ladder, they are exposed to many crucial challenges that act as a barricade in their professional growth. This disparity owes its origin to the gender inequality that has been prevalent in India since ancient times. Biasness seems to exist towards women employees in all perspective starting from hiring them to providing them financial as well as non-financial benefits. The pandemic segregation of work and male dominance in the executive machinery provide a vivid picture of the disparity that woman workforce suffer from in this banking industry. This study aims to shed light into the perspective of bank employees towards glass ceiling and also aims at highlighting the bottlenecks that aids this 'glass ceiling' and providing suggestions for breaking the same.*

**KEYWORDS:** Glass Ceiling, Banking Sector, Women workforce and Gender inequality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, women in India have been subjected to effacement by the patriarchal society. Even after 72 years of independence from the colonial rule, the women in India have not been truly liberated. This is vividly portrayed by the Gender Gap Index released by the World Economic Forum where India has been ranked 112 among 154 nations. The report further highlights that India provides very few avenues for economic development of women. This disparity has not left the banking industry in the nation untouched. Being the backbone of the economy, jobs in the banking sector are regarded as highly coveted. Post nationalization, this sector has witnessed remarkable increase in the proportion of women workforce. Despite this parity in representation, there exists an unshakeable artificial ceiling that has subjugated the women workforce and infringed their promotion to executive positions. This roadblock in the path of development is referred to as the 'glass ceiling'. The

dogmas and orthodoxy that prevail in the society have been shielding this ceiling. Over the years, however, the women with their prowess in the industry have been resilient to guard off this male bulwark. Their relentless efforts have been able to bear fruits as cracking the 'glass ceiling' of male chauvinism, few dynamic women have been able to occupy the executive positions globally in the industry. Though this number is marginally low, however, it has come as a ray of hope for women not only to crack but shatter the 'glass ceiling' completely in years to come.

## 2. BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978, the phrase 'glass ceiling', has been able to incite widespread researches. This term was popularized in 1986 through the 'Wall Street Journal' and many researchers have taken it as their research problem to identify and address the hiccups that women encounter while rising up the corporate ladder.



**Jeavons et al. (2002)** conducted a study to evaluate the position of women in the corporate sector. The study inferred that women are usually under employed by the organizations working in positions far below their capacity

**Naqvi (2011)** in his study reflected the increase in the participation of women in the male dominated arenas and also up the hierarchical structure. This breaking of the 'glass ceiling' has been attributed to improved literacy rate of women.

**Ayranci et al. (2012)** conducted a study to analyze the reasons responsible for hindering the growth of women up the hierarchical ladder of the corporate world. The study attributed male chauvinism and stereotypical premonition of society as the backbone of the 'glass ceiling'.

**Hurn (2013)** in his study illustrates the 'double burden syndrome' where women have to cope with the complexities of family and work, as the catalyst to aggravate the disparity followed at the workplace.

**Sachdeva (2014)** studied the gender discrimination that prevailed in the banking sector since its inception. The study analyzed the fact that there has been increase in the women workforce in the banks owing to the nationalization of banks.

**Perumal and Dastane (2017)** highlighted that Malaysian women force has been going through severe crises and their number gets thinner as they climb higher in their career paths especially in the IT sector. It was found from the study that cultural challenges viz; gender gap in mentoring, low self-esteem, gender inequality, family work-life conflict and cultural stereotype are the vital challenges which the women employees are encountering.

**Thapar et al. (2017)** conducted a study to analyze the bottlenecks that persisted in the banking sector for women, especially in the public sector banks and the role of government in regard to employees in the clerical and middle level. The study inferred that glass ceiling is evident in the Indian corporate sector in the form of conservative leadership and steps have been initiated by the Government to curb such disparity.

**Lathabhavan et al. (2018)** undertook a comparative study among public, private and foreign banks to analyze the improvement in women representation in the workforce and to describe the perception of women towards breaking of the glass ceiling. The study concluded that even though marginally, but the banks are moving towards the breaking of the glass ceiling.

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The patriarchal society and the undisrupted stream of orthodoxy that has been flourishing in India since ancient times have been depriving women of their

rights. However, the women have been resilient in breaking the taboos that bind them within the four walls of the house and in making their way to the corporate world. Being regarded as subservient to their male counterparts, women have been facing virtual barriers in their path of development. The gender based discrimination in the corporate world, commonly referred to as the 'glass ceiling', has emerged to be the most severe impediment to the prosperity of women. The imperturbable women, through their proficiency in world of banking have been able to make their way up the corporate ladder, though their representation in the executive positions is limited. This study will help to understand the hurdles that women employees encounter in their path of promotion as well as in highlighting the advancements the 'multi-task women' have been able to make thereby, cracking the glass ceiling. It will also help the women in the organization to climb higher in their career path by earning their due respect and recognition. It will further help the banks as well other organization in framing the required policy and thus empower and protect women force.

### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are;

- i) To study the perception of the female bankers of the selected private sector commercial banks towards glass ceiling; and
- ii) To examine the bottlenecks for breaking the glass ceiling.

### 5. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

**Research Design:** The research design is Descriptive in nature as it involves knowing the perception of the bankers towards glass ceiling as well as observing the bottlenecks for breaking glass ceiling without influencing the respondents in any way.

**Population:** The population of the study comprises of all the female bank employees working in private commercial banks in the city of Guwahati.

**Sampling Technique(s):** Convenience sampling technique has been adopted in the selection of the private commercial banks. Further, Quota Sampling technique is used and a fixed quota of 55 has been selected for each banks.

**Sampling Units:** The sampling units of the study consist of Axis Bank and IndusInd Bank operating in Guwahati. All the 15 Axis bank branches and 11 IndusInd Bank branches operating in Guwahati has been considered for the study.

**Sample Size:** 110 structured questionnaires has been distributed equally (i.e. 55 each) amongst the female bankers of the selected private sector commercial



banks. But however, only 49 responded back from Axis bank and 52 respondents returned their questionnaire from IndusInd bank. Thus, the sample size consists of 101 respondents.

**Data Collection:** Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire which was distributed both in digital form as well as physically. Secondary data were collected from journal and research articles.

**Data Analysis:** The demographic data are analysed by using percentage analysis method and to measure the degree of agreeableness the composite/mean score and standard deviation has been calculated.

## 6. GLASS CEILING IN THE BANKING SECTOR

Inequality in the workforce has challenged women in all sectors since antiquity. In our culture women is often projected as nurturer, affectionate, soft-spoken, selfless, gentle and compassionate rather than aggressive, dominant, strong, individualistic and independent (Butler, 1976). Rather than being treated as the powerhouse of economy, women have always been regarded as dependent on their male counterparts. The veils of patriarchy have often deprived them of the limelight and instead offered them a seat at the back. Robertson et al. (2011) emphasized that male character is the most favoured one in comparison to the female character.

Engagement of women in the banking industry had started as even before the World War I. However, their growth over the ages has not precipitated. In India, the deep rooted orthodoxy has further escalated

## 7. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1: Showing demographic details:**

Variable	No.	Percentage (%)
<b>Age:</b>		
21-30	52	51
31-40	41	41
41-50	08	08
51-60	00	00
<b>Work Experience:</b>		
1-5 years	59	58
6-10 years	27	27
11-15 years	14	14
16-20 years	01	01
More than 20 years	00	00

Source: Field Survey, January-February 2020

### Interpretation

The age group of the respondents mostly comprises the young adults within the age group 21-30 years (51%) followed by the adult group in the category 31-40 years (41%). Similarly the work experience of the respondents is highest in the bracket

the disparity in workforce representation. With marginal percentage of female in the labour force, the existence of male bulwark is evident even in contemporary times. The nationalization of banks in 1969 and the paradigm shifts in the society however, has worked to improve the position of women in the banking sector. Though the artificial barriers impose abstinence on the development and promotion of women, there have been instances of the buoyancy of women cracking the glass ceiling and paving a way for executive position. Arundhati Bhattacharya, former Chairperson of State Bank of India, Shikha Sharma, former Managing Director and CEO of Axis Bank, Shanti Ekambaram, President (Consumer Banking) of Kotak Mahindra Bank, Naina Lal Kidwai, former head of HSBC India and President of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Chanda Kocchar, CEO and Managing Director, ICICI bank, Kalpana Morparia, CEO JP Morgan (India) are few of the instances where the paradigm shifts from the pandemic male chauvinism to competence recognition has been espied, disregarding the gender biasness.

1-5 years (58%) followed by the respondents who have a work experience of 6-10 years (27%).



**Table 2: Showing the perception of the bank employees towards glass ceiling**

\*SA= Strongly Agree, MA=Mildly Agree, N= Neither Agree nor Disagree, MD= Mildly Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

\*\*SD= Standard Deviation

Sl. No.	Statement	SA	MA	N	MD	SD	Mean Score $\frac{\sum fx}{\sum f}$	SD $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum fx^2 - (Ms)^2}$
1	Women and Men face the same problems at the work-place.	16	21	07	51	06	2.9	1.26
2	Women give more importance to work life balance than career advancement.	28	49	01	09	14	3.7	1.34
3	Women are not always acknowledged for their efforts and success.	21	46	09	18	07	3.6	1.05
4	Women will encounter sexist barriers in the career path.	38	47	03	05	01	3.9	1.46
5	There is inequality with men in terms of financial and non-financial benefits.	04	13	02	43	39	2	1.15

Source: Field Survey, January-February 2020

**Chart 1: Showing the perception of the bank employees towards glass ceiling**



Source: Table 2

**Interpretation**

In order study the degree of agreeableness, the mean score of all the statements are calculated. Thus, it has been observed that the Mean score of the Statement 4 i.e. ‘Women will encounter sexist barriers in the career path’ is highest 3.9, followed by Statement 2 ‘Women give more importance to work life balance than career advancement’ which accounts for 3.7

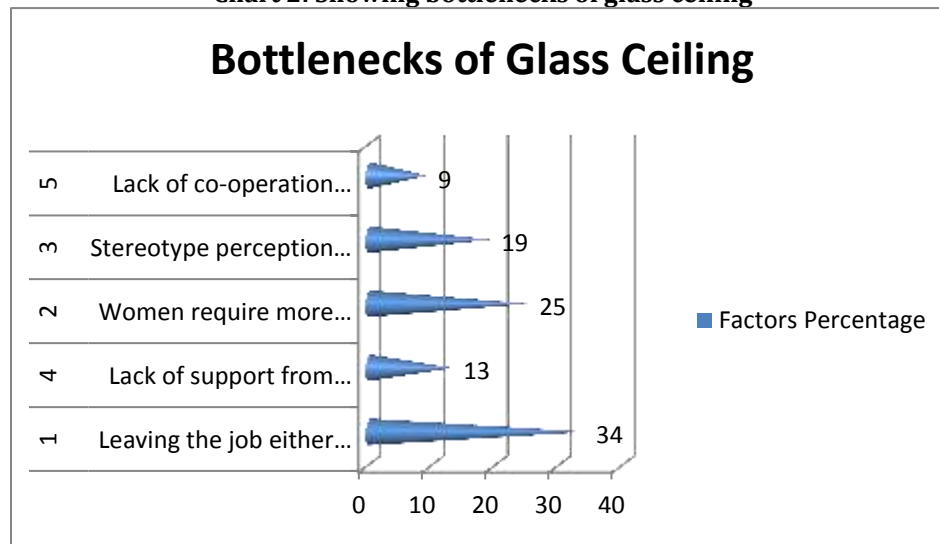
Standard deviation has also been calculated in order to examine the variability with different statements and the result shows that Statement 3, ‘Women are not always acknowledged for their efforts and success’ reveals the lowest degree of variability among the respondents, accounting for 1.05 which is followed by Statement 5, ‘There is inequality with men in terms of financial and non-financial benefits’ where the standard deviation is 1.15

**Table 3: Showing the bottlenecks for glass ceiling**

Sl. No.	Factors	Ranking	
		No.	%
1	Leaving the job either post marriage or after childbirth.	1	34
2	Lack of support from their family.	4	13
3	Women require more flexibility in work than men.	2	25
4	Stereotype perception that women cannot be good leaders.	3	19
5	Lack of co-operation from their male counterparts.	5	09
	TOTAL		100

Source: Field Survey, January-February 2020

Chart 2: Showing bottlenecks of glass ceiling



Source: Table 3

### Interpretation

The study illustrates that 34% of the respondents rated the factor 1 'Leaving the job either post marriage or after childbirth' as the prime reason for the creation of glass ceiling. It was followed by factor 3, 'Women require more flexibility in work than men' which accounts for 25%. The factor 4 'Stereotype perception that women cannot be good leaders' ranks the 3<sup>rd</sup> with 19% of the respondents agreeing it to be bottleneck too.

### 8. FINDINGS

The findings of the study pertaining to the objectives are;

- i. It was found that the bankers agreed that the women will encounter sexist barriers in their career path and that women give more importance to work life balance than career advancement.
- ii. The degree of variability was least for the statement that women are not always acknowledged for their efforts and success and also that there is inequality with men in terms of financial and non-financial benefits.
- iii. The study found that one of the most vital factors of glass ceiling is because of women leaving their job either post marriage or after childbirth which is followed by the reason that women require more flexibility in work than men.

#### General findings:

- i. It was found that women usually do not negotiate well for themselves and do not demand for extra perks and benefits.

- ii. They lack leadership ability and do not want to enter into any controversy in the workplace. They seem to be timid and hesitant to speak up especially when they outshine their male counterparts.
- iii. They have time as well as location constraints. They cannot spend more time at the office as they need to balance their personal life too. Similarly frequent travels or transfers are not desirable by women as it disrupts her family life.
- iv. Women are not risk takers and this is reflected in her decision-making ability. They exhibit lack of confidence in the boardroom which is more common amongst women. They are more conscious by 'looking glass self' rather than 'real self'.

### 9. SUGGESTIONS

The researchers have given the following suggestions;

- i. In order to remove the corporate glass ceiling small and comfortable steps should be taken starting from the base level. Recruitment and promotion should be on the basis of talent and competency rather than on the basis of gender.
- ii. The attitude regarding glass ceiling needs to be changed and this can be done only when the workforce are sensitive to the issue through proper understanding and empathy. Corporate glass ceiling can be removed only when the employees remove the ceiling which they have in their brain by identifying their limitations.





- iii. The banks should adopt a 'Zero-Tolerance Policy' in regard to harassment and discrimination. Taking up this initiative will undoubtedly boost the morale of the women and thereby will increase their productivity.
- iv. Encouraging flexible work schedules to all in order to remain impartial to any gender. Thus, flexible work timings, sabbaticals, job sharing, work from home must be embraced to encourage the employees to continue with their job.
- v. Recognitions, irrespective of gender should be approved for congenial work culture.
- vi. Banks should evolve a full proof performance appraisal system covering the entire spectrum of staff to discard any feeling of discrimination and to instill confidence amongst the women workforce.
- vii. Encouraging checks at the workplace to encounter sexual barriers and to take steps to render the workplace free of such barriers.
- viii. Women should learn to take power and be assertive and confident in their leadership roles.

## 10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following are the few limitations of the study;

- i. The study considered only private sector commercial banks operating in Guwahati.
- ii. The study comprised the perception of only female bankers and not male bankers.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The rise of glass ceiling in the corporate world has resulted into huge employee turnover as the women don't find a place in higher position. So, they are left with no other choices then to look for avenues in other companies with an expectation of making it to the boardroom. However, with the increasing number of women participation in the Indian banking sector has proved to be the harbinger of shattering the 'glass ceiling', the biggest impediment to women employees in walking up the hierarchical ladder of their corporate career. The pace of development has however been plodding since the years of liberation. Increased rate of women literacy and improved support from the Government, considering the fact that women employees in India differ from their western counterparts in terms of prioritizing work-life balance, will definitely go a long way in bringing parity in workforce representation and restoring the infringed rights of women. Thus, it can be concluded that glass ceiling has many cracks in it now and that the Indian private sector commercial banks are moving slowly but

consistently towards cracking the 'glass ceiling' with an anticipation of bringing positive outcomes.

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