Barriers to Career Progression of Women to Senior Leadership Positions: Indian Scenario

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Abstract:- This is an original paper which examines the various barriers which hinders the progress and advancement of women to senior leadership role. The factors identified and explored here is based on literature review of research studies conducted in the domain. The main barriers listed are Organizational, Socio cultural and Individual barriers. The impact of this on women's career path is explored here.

Keyword:- Career Progression Women, Barriers to Leadership, Women in Leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have made significant strides and have made their mark in all spheres of work globally and her contributions are being recognized. They have now made remarkable strides in roles which were otherwise considered largely in the male domain like manufacturing, automobiles, aircraft pilots, engineering, space research, defense forces to name a few. Traditionally women's presence was limited to conventional jobs in nursing, teaching, secretaries, human resource management etc. Women today participate actively in the labour force of almost all countries contributing to the economic development of not only her family as a unit, but also to the society and the country as a whole. Women have entered the workforce in all developed countries mainly due to economies opening new opportunities in the various service sectors of both public and private in nature (Burke et al 2011). Governments and private organizations attitude towards women working have also undergone very drastic changes and many measures and policies have been incorporated for the welfare and well-being of women.

Women have also become an increasing influence in terms of purchasing power and influence states Silverstein and Sayre (2009) and have become a significant economic force which cannot be ignored anymore. These researchers say that in USA women control $ 20 trillion in consumer spending, they earn appx $ 11 trillion in yearly income and this figure is bound to rise further in the coming years. Women are increasingly seen to be moving upward in human capital by achieving higher education at world-class universities and also acquiring all technical expertise and skills required to achieve their dream job and make their place and recognition in the society. It is interesting to note 54% of students who were conferred degrees globally are women, 30% of women take a degree in STEM versus 54% in Humanities and other streams. In India, there is substantial number of women enrolling for higher education master's program, but whether this gets transformed to long term career needs close examination and research.

In the last fifty years or so, the progress and advancement made by women has been very encouraging. Research on the participation and advancement of career of women has indicated the paradox of women's progress on one hand but existence of myths and gender stereotypes on women leadership capabilities and emotional quotient which still poses as challenges to her career path. The representation of women in senior leadership roles in public and private companies across all sectors have remained in single digit percentages. Several factors have been attributed to this absence of women in the top management. A survey by Catalyst in 2002 of twenty European countries states stereotypes and preconceptions and myths of role of women are the top barriers to women's career advancement. Men are seen to dominate senior leadership positions in most of the organisations and it was found to be difficult for women to break through this bias and discrimination right from recruitment to all aspects in the workplace (Powell 1999). Research has well documented the fact that women may not get the required training, mentoring and development opportunities to move from lower levels to these senior levels as aspired when compared to men (Powell 2010).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on literature review of various research studies available on the subject. Relevant literature from online platforms like Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest and also newspaper online and print, company reports were examined for this study. The literature was then separated and mapped to themes pertaining to the study. The main themes used here Organizational factors, Social, Cultural and Family factors and finally Individual Factors. This paper has been presented based on these themes.

III. STATISTICS OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT – GLOBAL

The current figures indicate the poor representation of women in top management globally as well as in India. Catalyst Report of March 2022 states that women in senior management increasing incrementally. The statistics are encouraging, but still a great deal of representation of women is still required to bring about a gender diverse and equal work culture in organizations. In 2021, the proportion of women in senior management roles globally rose to 31% which is the highest ever and most of the companies now have one woman at least in senior leadership roles. Looking at 2021 data, it is found that 26% of all CEOs and MD are now women compared to only 15% in 2019. In the fortune global 500 companies, 23 CEOs are women which includes 6 women of color. Region wises the percentage of women in senior management is the highest in African countries at

39%, followed by 38% in ASEAN countries, 36% in Latin American, 34% in European Union, 33% in North American and lastly 28% in Asia Pacific.

An analysis by Mercer in 2020 of about 1100 organizations around the globe found a pipeline which is leaky and that women are falling off the rung at various level as they progress in the organizations. The women support staff is about 47%, at the professional level it is 42%, at manager level it reduces to 37%, at senior manager level it is again down to 29% and at executive level at about 23%.

In Asia Pacific region, this report indicates that men dominate senior levels of management. In Australia, it is noted that in year 2020-21, women represented about 41% of all managers in the country, but are less likely to reach the senior leadership roles of management, only 19% of women accounted here are CEO s. The percentage of women in management is just 10% and only 5% women CEO s in Australia as on 2021. In South Korea the presence of women in management is 8%, Russian Federation just 6% and in Pakistan a mere 4%. Japan at the same time has 15% women in management roles despite having 40% of women participating in their labor force. Here also the women pipeline is not encouraging, with managers at 19%, senior managers at 11% and reaching vice president role is only meagre 7%.

When we look at Europe, it is found that women are poorly represented as managers in the EU, women comprise of 46.3% of those employed here, but only 35.3% of them reached managers position as on 2021.The representation of women senior executives are 20.2% and only 7.8% of women are CEO. In other European countries, the percentage of women managers are as follows, France 38.3%, Germany 30.1%, Italy 28.6%, Netherland at 25.5%, Norway 35.2%, Spain 33.9%, Switzerland at 33.1% and Sweden 43.8% which is the highest. The UK also the situation is somewhat similar with only 31 women in executive roles in the FTSE 100 companies which includes 8 women CEO s.

North American also faces a similar situation wherein the women managers in the US and Canada also faces hurdles and barriers to advance to senior management positions, only 86 women are promoted compared to 100

men resulting in an underrepresented pipe line at senior levels. The entry level representation of women in North American countries of US and Canada is at good 48% and falls to 24% women occupying C Suite. In Canada alone, men still continue to occupy 90% of the C Suite positions, women being only 52 out of 533 executive officer positions among the country 100 biggest companies publicly listed. There is a slight increase here in women occupying C suite positions from just 16% in 2015 to 20.5% in 2021.

United States of America which is one of the most progressive and forward-looking countries for working women, sees a record high women representation in Fortune 500 companies as CEO in 2021, but still men occupy a majority of the top positions in the best of best companies. In US, women are 47% of the labor force, but sees 40 .9% of women managers which is quiet a good sign for things to come in next few years here. Women of other race like Latinas, black and Asian women also found a share in their management at 4.3%, 4.3% and 2.7% respectively. Highest percentage of this women presence was found in HR, Medical and health service sector, Marketing and food service sectors. (*Women in management:* Catalyst 2022.)

A. *Global Gender Gaps 2022*

World Economic Forum in their July 2022 report on the Global Gender Gap states several factors regarding the Gender Gap Index. This index enables to benchmark the evolution of gender parity with the current state with respect to four dimensions they are Economic participation, Attainment of education, Health and Political environment. This index studies 146 countries in this year 2022 to benchmark the countries progress and steps taken to attain gender parity and equality.

This report clearly indicates various gender gaps across countries in all the parameters mentioned above. Looking at the gender gaps in leadership by industry, women hired for leadership roles have shown an increase from 33.3% in 2016 to 36.9% in 2022. An overview of the data for 22 countries for women representation in senior management roles, it is noted that only few industries have some kind of gender parity like non-governmental organizations wherein it is 47%, in Education it is 46%, Personal services and wellbeing it is 45% whereas the representation very poor at Energy, Manufacturing and Infrastructure only below 20%.
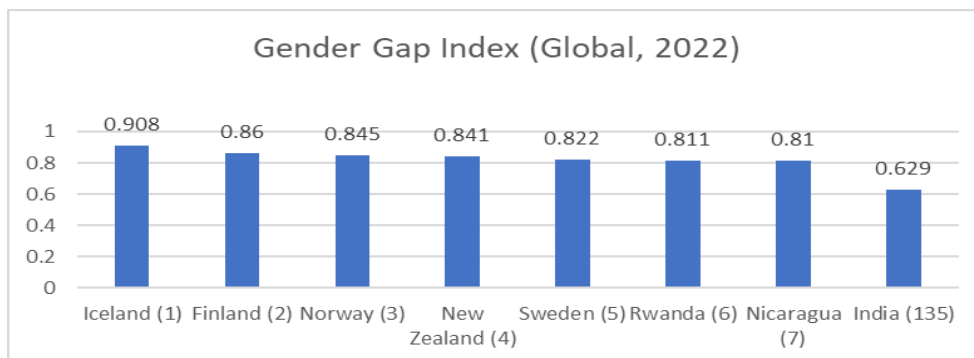

Fig. 1: indicates the global gender gap index of the top ten countries Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2022 – World Economic Forum

South Asia as a region has the widest gender gap in terms of economic participation and opportunity, having closed only 35.7% of the gender gap for this year. India is at 135th position at a gender gap index of 0.629 as per this report. This report indicates an increase in women representation in professional and technical area in India, Bangladesh and Nepal and also states that India and Sri Lanka have progressed on having more women at senior leadership roles.

IV. STATISTICS OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT: INDIA

The latest catalyst report dated August 2022 on women in India states the participation of women as a labor force is declining in the country, only 19% of women aged 15 years and above have represented the labor force whereas it is 70% for men. In spite of the economy exponential growth expectation from Rs 3 to Rs 8 trillion in the coming decade or so, the number of women working in the organized sector is still far less looking at the population of the country. Women are underrepresented across many sectors like it is 7% in infrastructure related oil and gas sector, automotive 10%, pharma and healthcare 11% and Information Technology, it is higher at 28%. This report also indicates that many at least 12 million women may be displaced by automation by 2030 in India which is 10% of women employed in the country, this is quiet an alarming sign for women who are already on a weak foot in the country. On the leadership representation of women, it is only 4.7% of CEO and 7.7% of board seats are held by women as on 2021. (Catalyst Report Aug 2022).

As per a study conducted by IIM Ahmedabad of NSE 200 companies, women in senior roles are at 7%, in top management it is even lower at 5%. JobForHer survey of 350 large, medium to small companies indicates that the women representation in senior levels dropped from 23% in 2020 to 13% in 2022. These numbers have shown an improvement from just 4.5% in 2014 due to SEBI mandatory norm of having at least one woman in the board of all listed companies. Several of the NSE listed top companies are trying to train, mentor and bring in more women at the senior leadership and board levels, the numbers at the top are still very discouraging and low.

A 2022 report by Deloitte on women leaders in India states that there is a decline in the number of women CEOs from 6.6 percent in 2016 to 3.4 percent in 2018 and again rising marginally to 4.7 percent in 2021.In February 2022, SEBI appointed Madhabi Puri Buch as its chairperson, she being the first women ever to head the country's capital market regulator. In the year 2020-21, Fortune 100 companies in India had only five women CEO s states the Fortune magazine namely Director of SAIL Soma Mondal, Director of IFFCO Anamika Roy Rashtrawar, MD of Indian Bank Padmaja Chunduru, CEO of Lupin Vinita Gupta, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Zarin Daruwala. Now we have few more additions like MD of ONGC Alka Mittal and Madhabi Buch as SEBI chairperson.

Sectors	Percentage of women working
Manufacturing	39.1
Education	22.0
Healthcare	10.8
IT & BPO	10.7
Trade Sectors	5.3
Transport	4.6
Financial Services	2.8
Hotels & Hospitality	2.5
Construction	2.0

Table 1: indicates sectors where women are working in India across all levels of management

Source: Ministry of Labor & Employment for year 2021 Report

According to a recent 2022 Ernst & Young report, women representation on board have improved, women now hold 18% of boards in India, up from 13% in 2017. But the number of women in non-executive positions is increasing, many of these positions are filled in by promoters or founders' women family members just to confirm and abide to the SEBI directive which mandates listed companies to have a gender diverse board with at least one women member on board.
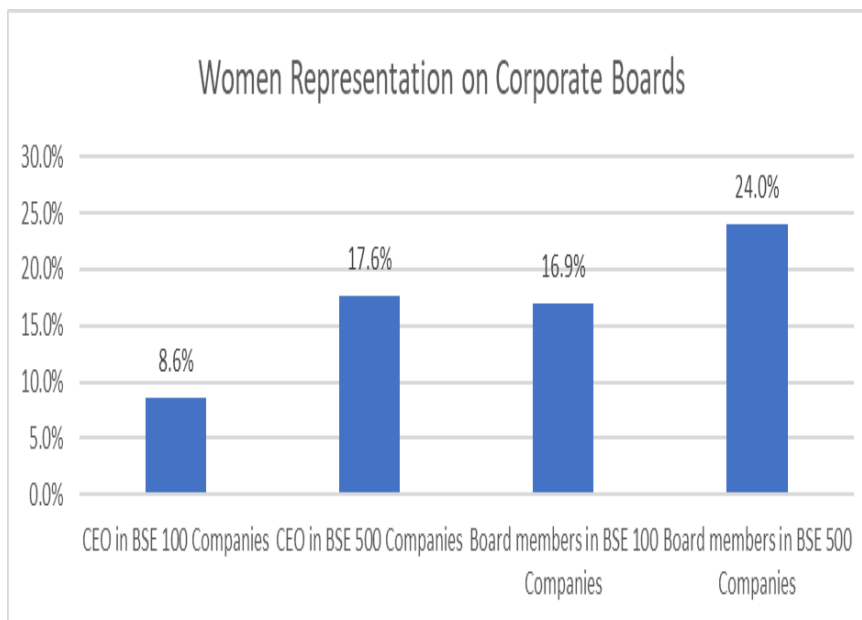
Fig. 2: indicates the percentage of women in senior management in BSE listed companies as on year 2022

Sector	Percentage of Women Directors (%)
Life Sciences	24
Media & Entertainment	23
Consumer Products & Retail	20
Technology	20
Energy & Utilities	15
Banking & Capital Markets	14

Table 2: Indicates Sector wise break up of women directors on board

Source: Ernst & Young Report 2022 published by ET Oct 2022

A. Where Women Stand – India Rankings

World economic forum in their 2022 report ranks a total of 146 countries, table below indicates where women in our country stand when compared to the rest of the world.

Women In Economy - India		
Parameters	**2022 Rank**	**2021 Rank**
Economic Participation & Opportunity	143	151
Educational Attainment	107	114
Health & Survival	146	155
Political Environment	48	51
Labor force participation	140	148
Wage equality	122	135
Legislators, senior officials & managers	123	140
Professional & Technical workers	118	136
Women in Parliament	118	128
Women in Ministerial Positions	126	132
Global Gender Gap Index India	***135***	***140***

Table 3: Women representation in Economy – World Economic forum Report 2022

Source: WEF Report 2022 and 2021. In 2021, total number of companies ranked were 156.

V. IMPACT OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP ON FIRM VALUE

It is very relevant to understand the impact of women leadership on the value of the organization they lead. Today companies are making considerable efforts to improve the number of women on boards and on top leadership positions and also bring in a gender diverse workspace starting from junior level recruitment, training, skill development and mentoring. There is often a debate on this aspect as to what real value does a woman as a leader brings in to the table and on the various functional aspects of impact of her leadership.

There has been several studies and research on the impact of board diversity on the firm value. Some studies indicate a positive impact of the board gender diversity, whereas there are few which remain neutral on this aspect. Gaio and Goncalves (2022) states that board diversity brings in a renewed communication, better idea generation and a new management process ushering in better and improved financial performance and thereby enhance the firm value. In this study, the authors analyze the relationship between the presence of women on boards in senior roles such as CEO and CFO and firm value of listed companies of European Union 14. The study clearly indicates a strong positive relationship between financial performance and firm value, the market expectations of future earnings of the firm were higher when a woman was CFO of the firm.

Presence of a woman on board brings about a more ethical and responsible management practices says Adams and Ferreira (2009). These researchers also states that women directorial board have greater potential for decision making are more rigorous in monitoring and more aligned to interest of shareholders. There are five aspects of benefit identified by Tarr -Whelan (2009) wherein the presence of women in jobs brings about in an organization. They are as follows

- Higher profitability, ability to tide over financial distress and more risk awareness
- Policies regarding family, individual and society health are formulated better by women
- Higher commitment to corporate and personal responsibility and better short term and long-term planning
- Brings in better alignment between work and family leading to better quality of life
- Participative decision making and much stronger cohesive team building

A study conducted by Catalyst analyzed data from Fortune 500 companies in the United States during the period 1996 to 2000 using measures to identify the financial performance of companies and found that the companies which had recorded higher financial performance and were in the top quartile of the list had women among their senior executive positions. Researchers Krishnan & Park (2005) states from their study on fortune 1000 companies on various parameters from period 1998 to 2000 that there is a strong linkage between financial revenues of the organization to more women representations in the senior team. Companies with larger representation of women in their senior leadership showed better financial performance.

VI. CAREER PROGRESSION

Career Progression has been viewed as advancement though the various organizational hierarchical structures of a single firm which is associated with enhanced recognition, compensation and status in the job at the firm and also the society (Visagie and Koekemoer 2014: Ballout, 2009). Career success or progress has been defined by promotion to upward mobility as per Thomas et al (2005) by means of empirical evidence (Clarke 2013).

Career progression for both the genders has to be upward mobility in terms of promotions, higher responsibilities and advancement from junior to senior level of management over a certain period of time. This progression is measured in terms of several factors like career growth vis a vis one's career goals, meaningful work, opportunities to learn and upgrade, work engagement and satisfaction, making an impact or adding value to the firm, career stability in the long term and the salary earned. All these parameters confirm to a successful career which will eventually lead to career progression and advancement to higher roles.

As far as women are concerned career progression path may not be same as that of men due to career breaks, disruptions in the career path due to pregnancy, motherhood, taking care of elders and such other family responsibilities. (Liff & Ward 2001). Ackah and Heaton (2004) states that while men are also challenged in various ways as they build families, it is women who are subjected to many more barriers and hindrances in their career during the child bearing years primarily being the care giver to the family as a social norm. It has been clearly studied and documented by several researchers on the impact of marriage, child care and such family variables on the aspirations and career paths of women. This family situation becomes an obstacle which is not directly linked to the organization, but progressive family friendly policies will definitely reduce women falling off the rung in their career at least to a certain extent. (Maria & Levine 2010).

Kirchmeyer (2002) studies the career progression of women in the 1990 's by analyzing data of men and women management graduating from a Mid-Western University in US. As MBA graduates both the genders earned quite the same remuneration, but approximately nine years later found the income of men had risen and again after four years sees the income gap between the genders was quite wide, the men seem to be taking financial strides while women achieving this kind of success is becoming more remote by their mid-career. The income gender gap widens as they progress. Women also step back from taking up more responsibilities at the workplace mainly due the family responsibilities. A decreased intent and priorities for promotion of women leads to reduced career advancement when compared to men and in this turn slowdowns her progression to senior leadership roles and reaching the top. (Kirchmeyer 2002) Moen & Becker states that scaling back

of career aspirations were more common among women than men in 1900's, women perceived their careers to be successful even if their wages were less when compared to their male counterparts.

The priorities of women in terms of career progression also found to be changing with age. The concept of career itself is undergoing a drastic change. Earlier theories of a linear career path based on organizational hierarchies and structure itself is very traditional approach and is not very relevant anymore, there is so many parallel and lateral tracks for growth and advancement available to women today. During and after the Covid 19 pandemic, this was quite evident and established as the working environment, structures and pattern have changed and evolved in the last two years or so. Work from home, remote and now hybrid form of workplace has evolved and employees of both genders are benefited with these facilities which was never heard off in traditional organizational structures. Gig worker, consultant, contract workers are the new norm, but how far all these new dynamics have enabled women to progress in her career is yet to be documented. Traditionally success in career was measured with variables as position, salary, hierarchical level you are working, but now it is measured with subjective variables like job satisfaction, work life balance, perceived sense of advancement and opportunities. For women these subjective factors hold more significance and she tries to strike a balance between career goals and relationship goals.

A. Key Barriers to Career Progression

Davidson and Fielden (2003) noted in their research that family responsibilities and lack of family friendly policies in the workplace as a major factor for women to progress in their career added with the fact that some are not willing to make that sacrifice individually to make that career growth. There are several Organisational, Socio-cultural and Individual barriers which acts as hindrances for women both in global and Indian context for women to progress smoothly to senior positions in the workplace.

Critical evaluation of the data and figures of women representation at senior leadership roles, indicates clearly that they are challenged with various barriers which hinders their career advancement. It is imperative to understand and state these barriers or hindrance for the sake of women, the organizations and the society at large. This topic has been extensively researched right from early 1900's. Even in so called progressive economies, women working in many of private and public organizations very early on and has faced many challenges and barriers to advance in their career to senior leadership at their workplace.

Gender Equality is still a start up in tech companies in India says Shelley Singh (ET article 2018). Women seem to be missing in numbers in the mid and senior roles even though they are half of the numbers in hiring. At Infosys, men still comprise 90% of the 300 senior level workforces, they have only handful of women representation at the executive level. At Wipro, only 10% of women are represented in their middle management, at Mindtree only 6% of women are at senior level, Capgemini has about 15%

women at senior roles. This imperfect balance is caused by 3M says industry experts, they are marriage, maternity and motherhood. Even if some women return after this 3M, they opt for back-end assignments rather than client interactions, the former profile having a slow career progress. It is interesting to note that IT industry has the best support systems and policies for women and have a gender equal compensation structure also, in spite of all that women are falling off the rung at mid-level and hence leading to their absence at the senior leadership level. Ms. Reddy, Head, diversity and inclusion of Capgemini attributes this to the socio-cultural set up of our country posing a major challenge to women having children and also lack of support from immediate family leading to women taking a back seat as far as her career is concerned.

Research in this area has been quite significant and can be grouped into three main themes as follows.
- Women's career development is largely based on organizational structures and hierarchies, due to complexities of these factors and interlinkage of many factors acting as barriers slowing down her progress. (Powell & Mainiero 1992)
- Second theme was the leadership effectiveness studies on the advantages and disadvantages of female leadership and masculine vs feminine traits and how these traits act as enablers or barriers for women in her career path. (Eagli & Carli 2003)
- Third concept which explained the barriers women faced was the gender roles played by men and women in the society and theories like social role and identity theory. (Eagli & Karau 2002)

From literature review of available studies done in this aspect, it is can be established that there are several factors acting as barriers for women career progression. They can be broadly classified into the following three
- Organizational Factors
- Societal and Family Factors
- Individual or Personal Factors

B. Organizational Factors

Organizational structures, organizational culture, policies, hierarchy, attitudes, prejudice and gender stereotypes often pose as impediments in many ways to the career advancement of women and are classified as organizational factors (Callas & Smircich, 1992; Fletcher, 1999; Martin, 1990). Even though organisations intend to provide equal and gender-neutral work environment to all employees, the very rules, procedures, formats and work environment itself forms a difficult entity for women to work efficiently and progress in their career as per their aspirations and career goals. Majority of organisations in the early stages had predominately men as a larger percentage as their employees and hence has developed a masculine way of working over a period of time, which has led to prejudices and forming gender norms for roles associated with women workers. Women in those days were found to be working as secretaries, clerical, accounts and administration departments which are treated as periphery workers not really involved in the decision-making key positions.

Kanter (1977) forms the tokenism theory to explain how this male dominated work culture often turns to a major obstacle for women to work and progress in her career. Several research in this aspect indicate that male dominated organisational culture as a major barrier and a negative influence to women career advancement. Male dominated work environment can prove to be difficult for women states Eagly (1992) who demonstrates this by her meta-analysis of Goldberg paradigms experiments. The female leaders were evaluated less favorably, in male dominated leader workspace when compared to their male counterparts, but was evaluated equally in roles that were not male dominated. In terms of everyday behaviour, male dominated settings lead to gender discrimination through subtle stereotyping, exclusion from office activities, questioning women's competence and even sexual harassment says Maume (1999). Women appear to be disadvantaged in such environments. A Turkish study also concludes and states this aspect of male dominance as one of the obstacles for women as they progress in their career. These women did experience difficulties in communicating and networking in a male dominated organisational culture and as a result there was a subtle discrimination in promotion and fair performance appraisal in such a culture. This impacted their advancement to senior key positions (Aycan 2004).

Another major barrier at the organisational level is the gender stereotypes which forms as a bias and prejudice towards women capabilities and leadership style. This pans out as preferential treatment towards men and their promotions and rise through ranks much easily than for women. Women who are determined and focused on their goals and has aspirations and ambitions to senior leadership roles are often termed as "bossy" and not feminine, at times they adapt their leadership style to what may suit her male colleagues says Rath et al (2015). Women are also perceived to be weak and taking decisions emotionally which may not be the trait required for an effective leader. These negative perceptions and stereotypes work as an obstacle for her advancement and progress to senior leadership roles. This has been established by several researchers (Jain&Mukherji,2010: Kolade&Kehinde,2013: Knorr,2005; Buddhapriya,2011; Parikh & Sukhatme,2004). Gupta et al (1998) in an Indian study survey's respondents comprising of 162 managers, 63 percent male and 37 percent female from services and manufacturing sector establish the following findings.

- 79 percent of women and 90 percent men believe there is no gender discrimination in hiring in their organization, but 74 percent women and 80 percent men perceive pregnancy make women less desirable employee than men
- 72 percent women and 91 percent men perceive that promotion and career advancement is based on merit and not gender, more than 40 percent of both genders believe there are significant barriers for women to advance to leadership positions and there is a gender gap at these positions
- Gender gap in pay parity was also noticed, 77 percent of women and 89 percent of men thought they are paid as equals. Women need to work harder than men to prove their competence and are perceived to be less committed

to organizational goals. 57 percent of women thought they need to be more masculine in their work attitude.

- Men were found to perceive women as less confident, more emotional and less objective in evaluating business situations, not as aggressive, competitive, ambitious and assertive enough to bring in positive business outcomes. (Gender Stereotypes)
- Women realize that they need to develop a management style suitable to their male team members and seniors in the team, they have a more interactive style vs commanding and controlling style of men.

Lack of training opportunities, exclusion from informal networking platforms, poor mentoring opportunities, lack of support systems and sexual harassment are the other organisation factors which acts as barriers to women career advancement. (Aycan 2004: Buddhapriya 2009: Ogden et al 2006, Zong et al 2011).

C. Societal Factors

Socio cultural factors which impede the career progress of women are mainly gender bias, stereotype, gender discrimination, family responsibility, lack of support from spouse and other family members. All these factors form a complex web of intertwined and interlinked elements which forms an invisible barrier for women which keeps her progress very slow when compared to men. This phenomenon is common across almost all societies including progressive western countries. According to Eagly and Kark (2010), the image of women as primary care giver staying at home and taking care of all domestic responsibilities and men as a bread earner taking care of all the financial requirements of the family was the dominant norm of the society. As ages progressed with more and more women educated and started taking up jobs outside home and supplementing incomes for the better prosperity of children and home, the narrative started to change. But the rhetoric of women still being the care taker of children, elders in the family and also responsible for all domestic chores at home still persisted to a very great extent.

Socio cultural barriers impact women in two ways firstly as gender stereotype norms of the society and secondly by their own perceptions and beliefs which are rooted in them from early on. (Aycan 2004) These factors impact on women and their careers have been an area of interest for researchers. Major barriers identified in this context are social stereotypes and related dual role complexities, Family responsibility, Marriage and Motherhood, Lack of support from spouse and other family members. (Posholi2012: Buddhapriya 2011: Jogulu & Wood 2011).

The social stereotypes are best explained by Social Role Theory by Eagly (1987) which explains as to why men and women behave in a particular way in the society due to social norms or roles ascertained to them. With the emergence of psychological research on the socio-cultural stereotypes about men and women behaviour, identification of people consensual beliefs about both these genders became clearer. These beliefs can be summarized as two types which are labelled as *agentic* and *communal* states

Bakan (1966). Men are considered to be more agentic in nature which are being assertive, competitive and dominant whereas women are said to possess communal traits like friendly, concerned about others, unselfish and more expressive of their emotions. These form the foundations for the general belief about men and women, these stereotypes constitute the gender roles. (Eagly & Wood 2012).

In India, the socio-cultural fabric is so complex and many a times a paradox. Women are getting more qualified and working in well paid jobs in most of the sectors in urban areas, but married women with children are burdened with dual role of delivering results at the workplace and at home at the same time, she needs to spend considerable time and energy in bringing up her children, attending school meetings, attending social gatherings like marriage, religious family ceremonies etc. This aspect of family obligations being a major barrier to women career advancement has been researched extensively. (Budhwar et al., 2005; Koshal and Gupta, 1998; Buddhapriya, 2011; Amer, 2013; Rajesh and Ekambara, 2013). India which has the highest number of working women has also the highest responsibility for household work and child care (Smith et al 2012). Catalyst reported in 2018 that Indian working women spend an extra of five hour 52 minutes for domestic chores whereas it is only 52 minutes for men which is the least recorded for most of the countries across the globe.

In India, women have done very well in professional sectors where there has been expansion, good growth and conducive working conditions. For example, the financial services sector, women are seen in senior management key roles like the CFO /CEO of the company. Women are heading both public sector and private sector banks in India as on today. Same is the case with Aviation sector, today we have 15 percent of India's 10000 pilots are women, whereas this is just 5 percent globally. Though this may be the case, it is worth noting that these figures are very small in percentage looking at the overall population of educated women in India.

The government launched "*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*" scheme in Jan 2015, wherein focus is given for education, safety and security of the girls. This scheme aims at prevention of sex selection and elimination of girl child before and after birth, general wellbeing of the girls, and ensuring education and social participation of the girl child. The Indian constitution abides by equal rights for women in terms of her fundamental rights, right to property, matrimonial and divorce, inheritance, education and employment. In spite of the social legislation and laws supporting women in all aspects, female empowerment in still very poorly implemented in our country according to Saini (1999).

Majority of Indian families especially in the semi urban and rural areas bring up their daughters and sons differently, daughters may not be given equal rights in terms of their property, education and employment. The social and cultural fabric of the Indian society to a certain extent conditions the perception of the parents and also the girl children. The traditional patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes

begins from home (Bandyopadhyay 2000). All these factors of gender stereotypes and attitudes vary from North to South, East to West of the country due to the varied and vast social and cultural aspects prevailing in these parts of the country. According to Alice Evans women in Southern and North eastern regions of India has more autonomy in education, marriage, ownership of assets, have fewer children, socialize more better in community and work alongside men. The author attributes education levels, agriculture pattern, caste dynamics and higher degree of patriarchy in the northern belt as the reasons. (Evans Times of India News report Oct 2020). Triandis (1989) had stated on Asian societies being more collective and familial which abides by traditions and stricter gender stereotype norms which promotes women being responsible for family and traditions. This aspect explains the paradox of Indian women, on one side they are breaking many "glass ceilings", but still being influenced by these traditional societal norms. According to Bimba and Kaliyamoorthy (2017), Indian society gives more importance to traditions and hence Indian women often face this dilemma of family and household responsibility against career progression. Few Indian studies do explore on these nuances of women's dual responsibilities and their long-term impact on their career.

Some of the other socio-cultural barriers women face are career disruptions due to family responsibility, unwilling to relocate, unsupportive spouse and lack of good child care support systems. (Cutler & Jackson, 2002; Aeran, 2014; Rath et al. 2015).

D. Individual Factors

There are several individual factors which are essentially required for women to succeed in their careers such as determination to succeed, motivation, high levels of confidence, self-belief, hardworking nature, leadership skills and most of all ambitions and aspiration to raise in the ranks to senior roles in their workplace. Those women with these kinds of traits are found to be doing better in advancing in their career. Attitude was another major attributer to career advancement for women, their problem-solving skills and willingness to sacrifice their personal lives were all key factors to succeed and progress in their careers. Several researchers have studied and proved this aspect (Zhong et al 2011; Aycan, 2004; Bennett et al 2006). Another line of research indicates that "Masculinity "also enabled women to progress in their career. Fagenson (1990) studied this aspect and found that women who possess more masculine traits like problem solving, meeting targets, determined, aggressive and pushy, dominating, leading and unemotional of all succeed in their workplace often promoted to senior leadership roles.

Rowley (2013) and Buddha Priya (2011) states that having high socio-economic status, higher educational qualification and higher designation in level of management are all important aspects positively impacting a women's career. The individual factors which act as barriers are women's inability to project her achievements in proper forums, at times not being ambitious and aspire to key leadership positions, inability to relocate and self-doubt on her own abilities. According to Rath et al (2015) women

tend to value and attribute higher significance to overall happiness and work life balance rather than higher job positions. Due to this, women do not promote themselves and are not competitive enough in their workplace which often becomes a major reason for their slow progress in the organisations (Jain & Mukherji 2010).

Ambitions and Career Aspirations of women are another important aspect which enables their progress to leadership roles. Lack of ambitions and clear career goals is cited by many researchers as one of the key weakness areas for women. (Kolade &Kehinde 2013; Rath et al 2016). According to Farmer, career aspirations are formed from three dimensions of career achievement motivation, mastery motivation and career commitment. These influence a person's achievement and persistence in a career. Farmers theory (1985) defines aspirations as learning representation from three types of interactive influences namely background like gender and abilities, psychological or personal influence like attitudes, beliefs and earlier experiences and lastly environmental or cultural influence. Research studies have tried to establish career aspirations to gender and their impact especially on working women. (Powell and Butterfield 2003).

Work Life balance was another actor which women considered to be important for them to continue working and be happy and satisfied in life as a whole. Work life balance is defined as satisfaction and good functioning at home and work with minimum role conflict (Clark 2000). Women working in responsible positions are often required to spend long hours at office impacting the time spend at home or doing other life activities. Juggling between office assignments, business meets, travelling and home responsibilities is taking a toll on their physical and mental well-being. Working women today are looking for a better quality of life and a healthy work life balance according to Revathy and Geetha (2013).

VII. GLASS CEILING FACTORS

Many of the mentioned barriers can also be termed as Glass Ceiling factors, but there is a difference between the two. When a woman who have already reached a particular position in the organization and who aspires to achieve a higher leadership role is intimidated and hindered by these barriers forming an invisible wall or ceiling to progress further, they are collectively termed as glass ceiling factors. The "glass ceiling" is a metaphor used to explain all the various factors which forms an invisible barrier for women to progress and advance in their career. This is phenomenon is experienced by women working at middle management levels who aspire to move to higher ranks to positions of authority and leadership. No matter whatever hard work and dedication, they seem to not get promoted to these positions simply because of their gender.

The phrase "Glass ceiling" was first coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978 while speaking at a women's forum at New York. She meant this as an invisible barrier which prevents women from advancing in their careers to reach positions of authority. This phrase went on to become popular due to an article in 1986 by Wall Street Journal to denote the barriers women face in corporate hierarchy which impedes women to progress in their career. Later on in 1991, the U.S Department of Labor formed the Glass Ceiling Commission in order to look into the concerns and issues women are facing and form policies and guidelines for corporates to follow to increase diversity at senior management positions.

Hillary Clinton ran for US Presidency in 2008 and again in 2016 against Donald Trump, she often spoke of this invisible barrier as "Highest and hardest glass ceiling" break to become Americas first women president. This as expected did not happen, later on Kamala Harris broke this hardest barrier to become first women of color as Vice President of US which was highly celebrated not only in India, but the world over.

There are also terms like "Glass doors ", "sticky floors", "glass cliff" which are used by researchers and media alike for various forms of barriers women face in their career path. Glass door is a when a situation a woman walks into and stumbles upon an invisible door, that is challenged with complicated situations which pose as a barrier for women to go through easily. Sticky floor is a situation wherein identical men and women are appointed at different ranks, men often at a higher level and women at the lower level, the floor gets sticky for the women to move ahead is the metaphor here. Glass cliff is when a woman is appointed at the topmost position when the organization is already in a crisis, it is a known fact that she is going to fail to deliver the results. Her position hangs precariously as if on a cliff.

In spite of continuous efforts from the government and private sector organizations, the representation of women at leadership roles sector wise globally for year 2022 portrays an abysmally poor level. In India although the numbers raising in ranks is gradually increasing, the numbers at the top are not very encouraging either. The country is 135th position in the global gender gap index by World economic forum 2022 report just above countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan shows its poor performance in gender parity as a society.

VIII. CORPORATE EFFORTS ON GENDER DIVERSITY

India Inc is pushing the gender diversity agenda in a systematic and objective way. Year 2023 is going to see this intensify and the corporate women hiring is slated to be higher compared to last few years says Basu & Bhattacharya in ET news (2022) Various corporates already have initiatives and policies in place to attract, train and retain women talent. Larsen & Toubro allows relocation of any women employee to a different city of choice. Diversity helps in getting best ideas and drives innovation says Head, Corporate HR, L& T. ITC offers flexible work options to expectant and young mothers, travel support for infants and

also care givers when mother is on business travel. They also have extended maternity benefits and childcare leave

HDFC bank has a formal structured approach to drive this diversity agenda. Their current gender ratio of 23.3% has been achieved through this program, they also have a "Bank Again programme "for talented women to return to work after a sabbatical. The bank has a three-tier structure for attracting second career women as a talent pool. Cognizant has now included a metrics for senior management for achieving the targets of gender diversity and this has been linked to compensation. This company has various programs, one among them called Propel for female leadership development program and another called The Returnship programme started in 2021 to attract talented young technology professionals to Cognizant says Ms. Young, their Global Head for diversity and Inclusion. The returnees are trained, mentored and upskilled with latest technology and are absorbed to main stream after that.

Consumer giant Procter & Gamble is currently focusing on STEM qualified women and has about 35% of its managers at manufacturing sites are women. Almost all the companies in Information Technology have already pushed the diversity objective since a few years now. Infosys, Mindtree, Capgemini, SAP Labs, Wipro and Accenture have already reported that half of their new recruits are women. (Economic Times dated 26 Dec 2022).

Intuit which has been the top list of best companies to work had launched two major initiatives for driving the gender diversity agenda between year 2018 to 20. The Apprenticeship Pathway Program to prospective women employees who shall enter the company for a seven-month apprenticeship, after training and mentoring shall be absorbed as employees. The second is "Intuit Again "return program for women on career breaks can join back following a sixteen-week training and skill building (McKinsey Women in workplace Report 2022)

Citi Bank had set a target of having 40% women at senior levels in banking and consumer finance by 2021 and launched a three-fold initiative for the same. Proactive recruiting to identify and recruit senior talent into the bank team, Inclusive hiring practice to hire diverse and deserving women candidates and third "Women's Career Empowerment Program "which trained appx 14000 women employees across the globe for over four months in communication, decision making and networking skills. All these strategies helped them advance in this goal from 37% women from VP to MD positions in 2018 to 40.6% in 2021 and have set a target of 43.5% by 2025. (McKinsey Women in workplace Report 2022)

There is an increased change in aspiration levels of women today when compared to the research studies of Powell and other researchers conducted some 20 years ago. Women have shown keen interest and eagerness to educate themselves, acquire a stable job and be financially independent and progress in their career (Budhwar et al 2005). Aspiration of young girls in semi urban and rural areas of India have shown a marked improvement. As per World Economic Forum Report of 2018, India's youth are optimistic and ambitious, wanting to look at future opportunities positively in the changing employment landscape in the country. These young adults see academic qualifications as very significant factor to realize their objective to get into well regarded professions. They seek career stability, good salaries and thereby upward career mobility and status in the society. There is a keen interest in entrepreneurship as well. Majority of the youth are employed with Information Technology, banking and finance, communications and such sectors in India which offer them a good working environment and is more gender diverse. (ORF World Economic Forum Report -Young India at work 2018 pg. 72-73).

IX. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper tries to examine the various barriers which women are challenged with in their career advancement process to leadership roles. The barriers identified are Organizational, Societal including family responsibility and Individual factors. These barriers individually or combined in nature pose hindrance for women to progress the corporate ladder to leadership. From all the literature available of many research studies conducted on these aspects indicate the presence of these barriers even today when women have indeed broken many a barrier and is working in otherwise male dominated industries.

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