CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:
CONCEPTUAL, EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL

It is true that the path of human destiny cannot but appal him who surveys a section of it.

— Max Weber

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of relevant literature on the phenomenon of glass ceiling. There is a plethora of literature on the glass ceiling for women in its various manifestations, not all of it though from the core discipline of sociology. Most scholarly work on the glass ceiling inequality is to be found in organisational psychology and management disciplines. Literature in the ambience of this review has been organised in terms of what it signifies on the field. Further, an attempt has been made to capture the ethos of the entire range of historical practices that together constitute what is known as the glass ceiling. There has been effort to establish an understanding of the glass ceiling through the sociological theoretical perspective that it is felt well penetrates the very heart of the phenomenon.

This review of literature is trifurcated in terms of its focus. The first aspect of the literature review is a discussion of the conceptual debates that came into play while giving body to the ‘new’ notion of the glass ceiling. Most early literature is to do with elaborating the concept of glass ceiling. Since the term emerged in the eighties the decade after that is devoted to clarifying what is meant by glass ceiling and developing it as a concept. Today when the term is used frequently almost loosely, this review of the historical development of the conceptual understanding becomes essential.

The next component of the literature review is a look at prominent interdisciplinary studies on glass ceiling from early times till recently. Some of these are a review of published books and journal papers. The remaining are media reports, from interviews with successful organisation heads, some are from first person accounts, a few are an overview of published reports of well-known research, IT or gender watch organisations. A situation that was encountered in the course of going through the literature was that bulk of the work happens to be from the field of management,
psychology and the behavioural sciences and little from sociology. It appears that the phenomenon has not been the centre of attention for sociologists in general. These studies tend to look at the structures of opportunity created within the organisation and preach guidelines for women to optimally utilise these opportunities. Studies specifically on the IT sector other than those surveys commissioned by research organisations are still fewer. Those based in India are barely present. This itself became an incentive to pursue the research - on all counts - the need to define a concept that has been so freely and slackly dispensed, the relative lack of sociological work on the theme and the thin presence of studies on the Information Technology Sector especially in India.

The third component of this review of literature takes a look at some of the theoretical formulations that may be useful in understanding the concept of glass ceiling in perspective. Since glass ceilings have not received as much attention from sociologists as other forms of inequality say caste or race have, there is no strand of sociological debate on the concept or theory of glass ceiling. Therefore this element on an overview of helpful theories that might lead us to a holistic understanding of the phenomenon has been placed within the literature review. Through the understandings generated from the literature review it has been made able to recognise the need for not just this kind of research in sociology but also the need for evolving a sociological definition of the concept of glass ceiling. In chapter 5 where primary data have been analysed to assess the presence of glass ceiling one such attempt has been made.

The Glass Ceiling: The Conceptual Debates

The phrase glass ceiling is one of the more fashionable social science terms of recent times. It is used freely and liberally to represent any kind of gender inequality virtually anywhere. However scholars have attempted at various points of time to assign a precise meaning to the term. Some investigators have looked at glass ceiling in terms of gender differentials in levels of authority (Wright, Baxter and Birkelund, 1995), or as differences in positions attained in the corporate hierarchy (Frankforter, 1996), while some have focused on the difference in the salaries between men and women (Duleep and Sanders, 1992), and others at occupational segregation (Fernandez, 1998) as the primary defining elements of the glass ceiling.
In an article entitled “The Glass Ceiling Effect”, (2001) David Cotter and his associates have tried to elucidate the exact meaning of the term glass ceiling and suggest means for measuring it. According to the authors the notion of glass ceiling effects implies that gender (or other) disadvantages are stronger at the top of a job hierarchy than at lower levels and that these disadvantages become worse later in a person's career. Using sophisticated statistical techniques they have examined gender and race inequalities in corporate organisations. They find evidence of a glass ceiling for women, but according to them racial inequalities among men do not follow a similar pattern. Cotter et al conclude from their research that glass ceilings appear to be a distinctively gender phenomenon (Cotter et al, 2001).

According to the authors part of the disagreement on the existence or otherwise of the glass ceiling stems from the lack of a clear definition of what is meant by a glass ceiling. A glass ceiling is a specific type of gender or racial inequality that can be distinguished from other types of inequality. The authors feel that one should not describe all systems of inequality in the workplace as glass ceilings. They believe that the glass ceiling is different and needs to be defined more precisely. It is different, and because it is different, it requires distinction from other inequalities. For Cotter et al, four specific conditions should be met in order to describe a gender inequality generated in the workplace as a glass ceiling effect. According to the authors each of their prescribed criteria is amenable to fruitful investigation empirically as exhibiting glass ceiling effects. They stipulate the following four specific criteria that must be met in order to conclude that a glass ceiling exists.

**Criterion 1**

According to Cotter et al the first criterion for a glass ceiling is that: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee” (Cotter et al, 2001). The authors argue that inequalities that people bring with them to the workplace as part of their ascribed or achieved non-market social statuses such as family background, ethnicity, or discrimination encountered in the educational system would not be considered part of the glass ceiling. They have measured glass ceiling after controlling for objective criteria like education and work experience and subjective criteria like “abilities”,
“motivation”, and other “job-relevant” characteristics. Naff and Thomas (1994) have treated support from a mentor as such a characteristic. What exactly are said to constitute job relevant criteria appears to be rather unclear. In some cases it could mean having a mentor or godfather, a charismatic personality, flexible workplace ethic, being adept at sycophancy or simply being in the right place at the right time. One could go on adding to this list. In fact both one’s cultural capital and social capital could be construed as job relevant. For example, while one would consider family circumstances (e.g., marital status, presence and age of children) non legitimate criteria for promotion and success and yet research including this very thesis demonstrates that these are important criteria that need to be accounted for in the context of establishing causation. ‘Job relevant’ criteria is obviously too wide a category to qualify for the purpose of defining the concept.

**Criterion 2**

The next criteria attempt to specify those distinctions. So, their second criterion states: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome” (ibid.). The federal glass ceiling commission of the United States of America describes the glass ceiling as an inequality that is higher in “the upper rungs of the corporate ladder”. Thus, Wright, Baxter and Birkeland also argue that “the glass-ceiling hypothesis is not simply a claim about the existence of discrimination within hierarchies; it claims that such discrimination increases as one moves up the hierarchy” (Wright et al, 1995: 428). For example, in an organisation or industry that has a gendered glass ceiling, the proportion of women would be lowest at the highest position. If gender inequalities are constant throughout the hierarchy, then that is simply a manifestation of gender inequality, not the more specific inequality of a glass ceiling. Studies of lawyers (Kay and Hagan, 1995), physicians (Lorber, 1988), engineers (Morgan, 1998), scientists (Tang, 1997), corporate officers (Frankforter, 1996), and federal bureaucrats (Naff and Thomas, 1994) have all conducted inquiries on inequality in the form of glass ceiling. They reveal the presence of some kind of upper boundary on the advancement of women and have studied glass ceiling through the application of this criterion. Reskin and Padavic (1994) have suggested that glass ceiling applies to women of all classes, as well as in the case of minorities of both sexes (1994: 82). If the barriers on the advancement of women are uniform
throughout a career then that is gender discrimination and not specifically glass ceiling discrimination.

The main difficulty with this kind of criterion is that in any organisational pyramid there are bound to be fewer personnel at the top than at the base. Thus, for say ten managers there would be one general manager. So hypothetically speaking, 9 out of those 10 have been denied promotion. If of those 10 to start with even assuming there was equal number of men and women then should the fact of a male being appointed general manager be reckoned as glass ceiling effect? Sociologists have always upheld the need for getting to the core of any situation.

**Criterion 3**

The next two criteria are closely related: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels (ibid.).” This third criterion overcomes the objections to the previous definition of glass ceiling. Some scholars have relied on the criterion of differential promotions to higher positions and raises of income as the test of a glass ceiling (Naff and Thomas, 1994; Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Stroh, Brett and Riley, 1996). But, the authors argue that the movement into higher positions depends on entry and exit of women. If men enter the job at a higher level it naturally follows that men will have greater chance of reaching higher job levels, even with parity in promotional chance; and if more women leave then that too would lead to more men reaching the highest positions. For Cotter et al not only outcomes but promotions and increase in salary are more gender biased at higher job levels. In other words the gender gap accelerates as one moves up the hierarchical order. Not many studies have tested for glass ceilings in promotions or raises in actual careers since that would require accumulation of longitudinal data.

**Criterion 4**

Some studies simply define the glass ceiling as disadvantages that grow over the career (Morgan 1998). Implicit in the notion of a ceiling is that a person has reached near the top in one’s career. The fourth criterion for glass ceiling definition is: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career” (ibid.). It has been suggested that to test whether a gender
gap in income or authority increases with the length of work experience studies should trace the trajectory of a career (Corcoran & Duncan, 1979).

Wright and Baxter (2000) have looked at differential rate of promotions on the job as the determining feature of a glass ceiling. In a response to critics Erik Olin Wright of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Janeen Baxter of the University of Queensland, strongly defend their choice of inequality in promotion chance as the defining attribute of the glass ceiling. According to them women in management regularly face obstacles to promotions and some of these obstacles are in the form of direct discrimination while others are built into the institutional structure and social environment. Further, women face disadvantage with regard to choice of job, salary, and prestige (Wright and Baxter, 2000). At the same time the authors have raised the crucial classificatory question, does the glass ceiling refer to some specific pattern of disadvantage faced by women or is this a generic term covering all forms of labour force disadvantages?

Some scholars, (Britton and Williams, 2000) opine that the term glass ceiling is simply a generic term; Ferree and Purkayastha (2000) and Wright and Baxter (2000) believe that the term designates a particular pattern of hierarchically distributed disadvantage. It is because of this that appropriate criteria need to be established for identifying it. They have argued that the glass ceiling should be identified through intensified discrimination at the higher levels of managerial hierarchies rather than simply the cumulative effect of continuous discrimination in promotion across various levels of managerial hierarchies.

According to Wright and Baxter the glass ceiling is neither a description of a result as suggested by Cotter et al, that there are disproportionately few women at the top levels in organisations; nor is it simply a claim that discrimination against women is pervasive at all levels of managerial hierarchies. “It is a specific claim that the obstacles women face to promotion relative to men systematically increase as they move up the hierarchy” (ibid.). They argue that women face obstructions in access to positions of ‘real’ power and, as a result, are denied promotions to higher levels of management and “whatever the specific mechanism, the glass ceiling hypothesis argues that the relative disadvantages women face in getting jobs and promotions are
greater in the upper levels of managerial hierarchies than at the bottom” (Baxter and Wright, 2000: 276).

Britton and Williams (2000) criticize this conceptualization of the glass ceiling on the grounds that the glass ceiling is about more than access to hierarchical positions; it also concerns access to income and prestige. According to them defining glass ceiling simply on the basis of promotions is too narrow a definition. A glass ceiling could be absent by that criterion and still be present on these other dimensions. Further, when glass ceiling is seen as increasing obstacles to promotions one overlooks the possibility of there being ‘glass ceiling’ at lower levels also. What Britton and Williams call glass ceiling is similar to what some others have called ‘sticky floor’.

In many discussions of the glass ceiling, the expression is used as a loose way of describing a variety of dimensions of the disadvantages women face in the labour force. Given the plasticity of language, there is no inherent reason to restrict the term to any one specific dimension of inequality. However, as Britton and Williams caution, depending upon the usage of the term glass ceiling, descriptive adjectives would need to be deployed to specify what type of glass ceiling (salary, promotion, prestige, authority etc.) that one has in mind.

The definition of glass ceiling has to have in it a spirit of the metaphor and also the letter of the meaning of that metaphor. In the conceptual debates on the nature of glass ceiling there has been consensus on the fact that glass ceiling represents inequality within an assumed environment of meritocracy and that women are the most likely targets of this inequality. What lacks consistency is the manner of defining this inequality.

In the discipline of sociology in particular there has been a history of vesting freedom in the hands of the researcher to define concepts and the concept of glass ceiling should be no exception. Debates on semantics are only useful to the extent that these help in clarifying, operationalising and empirically testing the extent of the glass ceiling in an organisation through quantifiable indices. These issues of linguistic convention are really not what are at stake in the debates over the glass ceiling. And yet in order to study the phenomenon it becomes a prerequisite to define it with clarity. An attempt has made in chapter 5 of this thesis to give a sociological
definition of the glass ceiling inequality. What also emerges through the forgoing conceptual debates is the distinction between discrimination in vertical mobility and other forms of discrimination, and the importance of knowing the manner and the degree to which such discrimination is scattered across hierarchies. This is the substantive issue in the context of the glass ceiling hypothesis. These concerns are addressed in detail in subsequent Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the thesis.

The disagreement if any with regard to glass ceiling appears to be thus not a disagreement on the existence of the glass ceiling per se.

Glass Ceiling Studies

This section takes a broad based interdisciplinary overview of the various studies on the presence and persistence of the glass ceiling inequality. Effort has been made to cover a wide spectrum of literature from all the three decades in which work has been done on the glass ceiling inequality. Literature has been collated and organised into subsections based on certain principal common themes that the works reflect.

Comprehensive Case Studies: Glass Ceiling in the Workplace

A comparative study of United States, Sweden and Australia, conducted by Janeen Baxter (2000) of the University of Tasmania and Erik Olin Wright of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, has examined the glass ceiling metaphor, both in its literal narrow sense, as well as in a more general sense pertaining to a series of blockades to a woman’s career growth because she is a woman, to see if it is globally rampant and applicable. According to the authors “general-case” glass ceiling hypothesis states that it is harder for women than men to be get promotions to reach upward levels of authority hierarchies within workplaces and that the difficulties in career that women face relative to men also increase as they move up the ladder. In other words discrimination in promotions based on gender becomes more intense at higher levels of the job hierarchy. In practice, this implies that the rates at which women are promoted to higher levels when compared to men would decline with the level of the hierarchy. The authors have explored this hypothesis with data from three countries: The United States, Australia, and Sweden. Their basic conclusion is that while there is strong evidence for a general gender gap in authority, but going by the
yardstick of promotion prospects they do not find any evidence for systematic glass ceiling in the United States and only weak indication of glass ceiling effects in the other two countries (Baxter, 2000).

This conclusion by Baxter and Wright shows the significance of the definitional aspect of the concept of glass ceiling. Where glass ceiling has been understood through a reduction in the rate of promotion at job hierarchies the authors have been unable to empirically find the existence of glass ceiling despite there being fewer women at the top! These are some of the issues that have necessitated the conceptual clarifications to arrive at a sociologically sound definition of glass ceiling that has been suggested in chapter 5 of this thesis as the principal basis through which the primary data have been examined.

In 1999 when a woman Carleton Fiorina became CEO of Hewlett-Packard, she was the first female chief executive officer of a Fortune 500 company. This was accompanied by exultant media response that glass ceiling for women had been eliminated. Fiorina claimed that women do not face any limits whatsoever in their career mobility; that there was no glass ceiling (Meyer, 1999: 56). On the other hand, Catalyst\textsuperscript{1}, an independent research group, in a report on corporate women showed the persistent presence of a glass ceiling in America, especially for women of colour. According to this report, women of colour perceive a more severe “concrete ceiling” and not simply a glass ceiling (Catalyst, 1999). In fact research shows that for women at all job positions, particularly women managers, there exist several barriers to upward mobility such as role conflicts between job and household, occupational stereotyping by gender, lack of mentors, insufficient feedback and development incentives, and isolation from informal work groups. Studies have found that the salary gap by gender increases throughout the job hierarchy with a sharp accentuation at the upper end implying a glass ceiling. Sexual harassment at workplace has also been a matter of concern. Even in the United States of America where there is stringent legislation in the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which declares sexual harassment at the workplace as illegal, it is reported that it continues to be pervasive. Organisations are said to practice double standards in defining competence and

\textsuperscript{1}Catalyst is a leading global non-profit research based organisation with a professed mission to expand opportunities for women in business. It creates awareness for more inclusive workplaces where employees representing every dimension of diversity can thrive. Catalyst web site provides a good source of information on women and work including latest statistics.
professional women at higher positions are likely to be judged by different standards for their work performance from similarly placed men, even when all characteristics except gender are visibly the same (Johnson, 2008; O’Connell et al., 2008). Some studies report that women are denied access to informal networks that allow them to understand the intricacies of power structures that are the key to corporate survival (Schipani et al., 2009). Research has found that women, relegated to specialise in a small area of the corporate enterprise, find themselves in networks that lack diversity and control and are removed from the understanding of the broader workings of the system. When jobs within an organisation get bifurcated gender wise it leads to a kind of a “corporate purdah” (Lindsey, 2011). Women globally continue to report gender discrimination as the most frequent barrier to their advancement. Studies show that in the elite ranks of professions regardless of the law and the fact that women have qualifications comparable to men, a gender bias emerges that prevents a woman’s move up the corporate ladder (Metz and Tharenou, 2001; Johnson, 2008; Singh et al., 2008).

Although lateral movement is possible, women are not able to advance well hierarchically. Studies show that at some level of subconscious choice personnel are appointed and promoted in accordance with a deeply entrenched stereotypical masculine model that categorizes men as more capable, commanding, aggressive and objective leaders than women. A woman’s other family roles especially as mother, are viewed as detrimental to leadership qualities (Lindsey, 2011). Market figures fluctuate but over the last decade, in the fortune 500 companies, women represent only 1-2% of the CEOs, 16% of corporate offices and 15% of the Board of Directors. Out of 1000 Public Sector companies in the US with at least one billion dollars annual revenue only 30 have female CEOs; in the UK out of the FTSE 100 list only 3. In India of the Bombay Stock Exchange 100 companies with over a thousand directorship positions less than 50 are held by women. In Canada about 15% of the directors of companies are women and almost similarly so for the USA. Globally speaking it is the men who rule – literally. Only 17 independent nations are led by women (Sandberg, 2013: 5). Women hold about 20% of the seats in parliaments globally. According to data from the inter-parliamentary union as of 1st November 2014, in India only 11% of the Lok Sabha seats are held by women placing the country at 113th position among 147 countries (ipu.org, 2014).
The recently released ninth edition of the “Global Gender Gap Report 2014”, of the World Economic Forum quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities and charts their progress over time. The report has presented an index known as the Global Gender Gap Index to measure the relative gaps between women and men across the four key areas of health, education, economy and politics. Among the 142 countries measured, the Nordic nations dominate and although no country can claim to have perfect equality, Nordic nations remain the most gender-equal societies in the world. The top ten nations are Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Ireland, Philippines and Belgium in that order. The United States is at 20th position. Among the BRICS grouping, the highest-placed nation is South Africa (18), Brazil is next at 71, followed by Russia (75), China (87) and India (114). In the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines is the region’s highest-ranked country, and the only Asian country in the top ten. The report finds that the position of India has slumped to 114th, making it the lowest-ranked BRICS nation and one of the few countries where female labour force participation is shrinking (World Economic Forum, 2014).

According to the first comprehensive “Global Report of the Status of Women in the News Media 2011”, commissioned by UNESCO and undertaken by the Washington based International Women's Media Foundation, even in professions such as the media where women are more ubiquitous often turning into glamorous icons, bulk of the ‘real’ jobs are held by the men. The research spanning a period of two years, covered 1, 70,000 people in 500 news media companies in 60 countries divided into seven regions. The report says that despite the high visibility of women in the media, globally about two thirds of the reporting jobs are held by the men. Only 27% of the personnel at decision making positions are women. In Asia only 13% are in senior management. The study assessed gender equity in news organisations by looking at women’s representation, pay differences, hiring practices, growth opportunities and pro-equality policies or the lack of them. The weighty document shows that though women have a larger than life profile in the media glamorising the television screen, in real terms they are not in the picture. In the Asian region, women form just 13% of those in senior management. Out of the ten Indian newspapers, six TV stations and one radio station covered by the study, men outnumber women 4:1,
and the under-representation is found across categories, the worst being at the top management where there are only 13.8% women (IWMF, 2011).

Morrison, White and Van Velsor (1987) have discussed the problem that in the United States of America in spite of the government’s Glass Ceiling initiatives and the Civil Rights Act women continue to be submerged under the glass ceiling. Based on a three-year study of 76 female executives from Fortune 100 companies, the book reveals how the executive environment in a workplace is in fact different for women than for men. It examines the factors that determine success in a corporate environment, and looks at what the authors call the new obstacles along the road to the top. The authors point out that at the time of writing the book women comprised of nearly half of the workforce, were in more management positions than ever before, but had still had not been able to reach the most important job levels in the Fortune 500 corporations. According to Morrison and her colleagues, there is indeed an invisible barrier in corporations that keeps women from rising above the level of a general manager. The study concludes that this glass ceiling is difficult to break through. When women break through this ceiling an increasing number of them encounter a second unexpected barrier what the authors describe as “the wall” which they suggest is even harder to crack than the ceiling. The symbolism of the wall is employed to allude to those barriers of tradition and stereotype that isolate women from positions of real power in an organisation what the authors refer to as the “inner sanctum” of senior management. According to the study it will be a “long time” before women make it to the very top of an organisational ladder. The book was among the first of its kind to suggest practical strategies for breaking these barriers presenting what the authors call a “step-by-step action plan” to help corporate executives.

A decade later Lyness and Thompson (1997), have also discussed a similar phenomenon when women are promoted to higher ranks. The authors refer to this as the “second glass ceiling”. According to the authors though women are promoted to higher jobs they are assigned relatively less crucial tasks, are given fewer incentives like stock options or coveted overseas assignments, and also manage smaller divisions than the men. In this study the authors have compared career and work experiences of male and female executives in financial services holding comparable positions. The study has been conducted making use of archival data. The authors conclude that
similarities were found in several organisational effects such as employees’ compensation and many work attitudes. The significant differences were that women had less authority, received fewer stock options and had less opportunity for foreign travel than men. The study found that women at the highest career levels reported more obstacles than those at lower levels. According to the authors those who are above the ceiling have come up against a second higher ceiling.

Marylyn Davidson and Cary Cooper (1992), based on the situation in the United Kingdom point out that within their next decade, women would constitute around half of the total workforce in the UK. However, despite legislative measures the majority of women continue to remain concentrated in low pay, low status, gender segregated jobs. The authors bring out how the work, home and social settings interact with the individual. A comparison of occupational stress levels experienced by men and women in management shows that women face more intensive stress loads, with higher costs in physical, mental and emotional health. Women get stressed due not just to their work but due to having to behave according to socially dictated expectations. Women who defy these behavioural stereotypes are often assigned pejorative labels such as ‘iron maiden’, which are often used for strong and powerful women that bring to question their very feminineness. The solution the authors opine lies in the application of organisational equal opportunities policies and programmes and adoption of an “androgy nous management style” which incorporates elements of conventionally ‘male’ and ‘female’ behaviour patterns. This book brings out that equal opportunity is a key issue both within corporate and the social body politic.

In an article, the outcome of intensive research, authors Alison Eyring and Bette Ann Stead (1998) have described “Project Breakthrough: A Survey of Corporate Practices for Shattering the Glass Ceiling.” In this research sixty-nine companies in the Houston area in the state of Texas in USA were surveyed. They have offered evidence that shows the presence of the glass ceiling inequality in its various aspects. The authors have compiled a list of existing corporate practices that encourage the glass ceiling, based on their own field observation. Text box 2.1 shows the list prepared by Eyring and Stead. Some of these are subtle behaviours while others are directly discriminatory. This survey was done in 1998 but more recent literature has also shown similar findings.
Text Box 2.1

Successful Corporate Practices which Become Barriers to Shattering the Glass Ceiling

- There is a lack of informal advice and sponsorship that men get from one another.
- Paternalism limits work assignments and the necessary experience for advancement.
- Women who are forceful and aggressive, traits which help men advance, are often regarded by male counterparts and supervisors as too pushy.
- Lack of lateral movement (glass walls) deprives women of experience in line supervision needed for vertical advancement.
- Putting women in line jobs is perceived as risky.
- Many men feel uncomfortable dealing with women and doubt that women can balance a career and family.
- Male executives tend to support people like themselves.
- Reluctance to admit women into informal office networks exists.
- Sexual harassment still exists.
- An executive wants to work with a man as he is not sure how a woman will react (take it on the chin or pout) to his demands. He looks at her and sees his mother, sister, wife, or daughter.
- Recruitment practices involve reliance on word-of-mouth and employee referral networking.
- Executive search and referral firms are used in which affirmative action/EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) requirements were not made known.
- Developmental practices and credential building experiences including advanced education and assignments to corporate committees, task forces, and special projects are often not as available to minorities and women.
- Accountability for Equal Employment Opportunity responsibilities did not reach to senior-level executives and corporate decision makers.
- Monitoring for equal access and opportunity was almost never considered a corporate responsibility or part of the planning for developmental programs and policies.
- Adequate records are not generally kept (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).
- Women’s participative management leadership style is seen by men as a lack of authoritarianism and confidence.
- Women who adopt a male leadership paradigm are penalized by many organizations as they are perceived as unfeminine.
- Standards of performance are higher for women and minority men than for traditional managers in the same job and responsibility level.
- Men attach less prestige to professions that attract a large number of women.
- Human resource officers believe that women are less committed to careers, have less initiative, and are less willing to take risks.
- Companies have not connected cost containment with retention and advancement of valued women employees as they have not yet experienced projected shortages of qualified males.
- A survey noted that many employers deny that obstacles exist.
- Many board rooms remain cozy clubs, where CEOs interact collegially with peers.
- Some CEOs fear that women won’t know or observe the unspoken rules? such as saving sticky questions for private conversations.
- CEOs worry that women will want to devote more time to women’s issues, such as family leave.
- Many employers deny that obstacles exist.
- Giving women line responsibilities is perceived as a risk at companies.

— Eyring and Stead, 1998: 247
All studies have arrived at similar conclusions with regard to evidence of progressive discrimination against women in the workplace. The only problem is with regard to the usage of the term glass ceiling. Some recognise the disparity as unique and designate it as glass ceiling while others regard it as yet another manifestation of existing systems of inequality. The basic conclusion that emerges is that women are systematically blocked out of desirable positions in the workplace through subtle discriminatory mechanisms that circumvent and defy any proactive legislation.

**Occupational Segregation and Gender Stereotyping**

Furthermore, other studies by various scholars have highlighted specific dimensions of the glass ceiling conceptual complex and the related terminological variants. Some of the significant studies have been described as below.

**Glass Wall**

A related concept that is often used along with glass ceiling is that of the Glass Wall. What a glass ceiling is to vertical movement a glass wall is to lateral movement in an organisation. A glass wall is an organisational divide based on gender into functionally different areas for men and women. Because of gender stereotyping women are blocked from positions in certain departments and for certain kinds of tasks. This results in the erection of glass walls. Further, there is a tacit agreement on an occupational segregation in society as to what constitute the female professions. The irony of it is that these so called female professions like teaching or nursing are not the exclusive domain of women. Studies have shown that when men enter these feminine occupations they bring their gender privileges with them and experience not only acceptance but rapid upward mobility as though they are riding an escalator. These subtle mechanisms that enhance a man’s position in a profession collectively are referred to as the ‘glass escalator’ effect (Williams, 2012). Statistics also show that the gender gap in engineering, especially in the high tech specialties is increasing.

These glass walls are found across professions. In the field of medicine there is a gender divide between medicine – which a woman can enter, and surgery – traditionally a man’s world. Dr Reina Khadilkar, a surgeon at a Mumbai hospital in a novel, presents a first person account through fiction, of the trials and tribulations of a woman in the male bastion of surgery. According to her, the ability of a female
surgeon is still doubted even as patients contemplate a second opinion. The novel is set in the 1970s and through her protagonist Khadilkar recounts the problems faced by a woman practitioner in the male dominated profession of surgery (Khadilkar, 2011).

Glass Cliff

Another terminology related to the glass ceiling is that of the glass cliff. When women break through the glass ceiling they also often encounter what is known as the Glass Cliff. Women who reach the top are often cast into positions where they are more likely to fail than succeed. A study conducted by Yale University behavioural scientist, Victoria Brescoll and her associates (2010), has revealed that when women hold leadership jobs in a predominantly male domain their position becomes very fragile. Since jobs are stereotyped by gender the study shows that women who hold male jobs are often given less support; they may be appointed to lead organisational units that are in crisis or they are not given the resources and support needed for success (Brescoll, 2010). Glass cliffs thus act as deterrents for women who would try to break the glass ceiling. The term glass cliff has been so used because a cliff represents a steep height and like on a cliff this is a danger which involves the risk of falling. Women tend to be subject to greater scrutiny and be judged more harshly for mistakes. According to Brescoll any mistake a woman makes heading an organisation tends to be magnified.

Sticky Floor Effect

Some literature has focused on the self esteem component of the glass ceiling divide. Another concept often understood in conjunction with glass ceiling is that of Sticky Floor. This is a small comfort zone from which women would rather not shift for personal reasons. Often a woman has to be pushed to see herself in a top job. Research shows that sometimes women themselves harm their own careers for various reasons personal and social. Women do not show adequate faith in their ability to handle higher level jobs. Because of the sticky floor syndrome many women are unable to reach up to the glass ceiling.

Rebecca Shambaugh, (2008) points out that though statistically a third of Fortune 500 managers are women yet women represent barely five per cent of the top earners among executives. According to Rebecca Shambaugh, the reason for this
anomaly is the low self esteem of women themselves. For Shambaugh the real obstacle to women's advancement is not a glass ceiling rather it is that women impose career blocks upon themselves that prevent them from moving up. Women hold themselves back in their careers and shy away from top-level career success. According to Shambaugh women indulge in what she calls “career-inhibiting behaviour” which thwarts their upward mobility. Shambaugh opines that women more than men avoid taking on leadership roles; they do not take decisions to change jobs to improve their career prospects out of some misplaced sense of loyalty. The book offers suggestions for women to come out of their sticky floors.

Sheryl Sandberg (2013) also exhorts women managers to ask for their rights. According to her women tend to react emotionally to situations where cool practical reasoning is required. She advises women not to feel shy to ask – whether for pay raises or challenging assignments. Indeed her advice to women is to ‘lean into’ their careers. Sandberg herself chief operating officer of the social networking site Facebook has become a role icon for those wishing to succeed in the industry. Women increasingly are said to be trying to emulate her. The tremendous impact that she has made is often referred to as the ‘Sandberg Effect’.

Communication Gap

Some other studies have focused on the sociolinguistic dimension of the gender discourse. Louise Mullany (2011) says that in spite of the advances made by women in various professions that were previously the male domain, they are yet unable to break glass ceiling like barriers in the progress of their career. Mullany looks at the interplay between language and gender in the workplace. She examines how men and women use language differently to negotiate workplace realities. At company meetings for instance verbal and nonverbal behaviour of men and women is different. Modes of speech become strategic arbitrators in the workplace dialogue. What is seen as stereotypically feminine speech is used for the enactment of covert domination by both men and women while what is perceived as typically masculine linguistic idiom becomes a strategy for exercising overt control. Through a linguistic perspective Mullany tries to analyse gender inequality and also gives certain suggestions for overcoming it.
Deborah Tannen (1995), also opines that in any workplace the ways in which people communicate is a significant determinant of professional success. The more effectively articulate get heard, get ahead, and get things done. Using the linguistic perspective she examines how indirectness of expression as a sociocultural norm is common to some cultures and also to the feminine gender. It is these differences in the conversational rituals of men and women that distort communication in the business world. People through errors of communicative interaction unintentionally erect barriers that act as impediments to upward mobility and career growth. Work put in can often go underappreciated or even without being noticed due to insufficiencies in dialogic communication. Language is internalised differently by men and women; it is so gender centric that often men and women can engage in non-productive or counterproductive conversation saying one thing but conveying an altogether different meaning. Tannen proffers advice on how women managers can get acknowledged, receive credit and move ahead in an organisation.

Interestingly this view is endorsed in a report of a study published in the newspaper Business Line of March 16, 2012 (Waschatz, 2012). The report says that experts have found that men and women attach differing significance to messages and react differently in the office. Men need clear instructions while women talk through suggestions, for instance the report says, that when a woman says “Shouldn’t we call a meeting” she actually means call a meeting. Men however respond to communication in a literal sense and do not comply unless a command is unambiguous and clearly stated. It is also presumed that women tend to have lower self-esteem and (therefore) react to praise more conservatively than their male co-workers. According to the study it is these different communication behaviours that are coming in the way of a woman’s success in an organisation. The underlying principle advocated through these studies is that if a woman wishes to succeed she has to adapt and acquire the communication behaviour of men.

Subtle Biases

Still other studies have focused on gender discrimination that occurs as a result of subtle sometimes unintentional biases due to individual and group predispositions that continue to flourish despite no official recognition accorded to such behaviours. These predispositions are not exclusive to the men. Many women themselves are
caught in a mind warp as it were. Studies indicate that women have a tendency to undervalue themselves in work related spheres. Behavioural scientists have found that women and men allocate credit for joint success very differently (Heilman and Haynes, 2005, 2013). In any male-female occupational dyad the male member is automatically attributed as endowed with greater competence. Credit is given to the male for the success of a team task including from within the team itself. Men do not have much trouble taking credit for their team’s success rather they do so with ease. Women on the other hand in any collaborative context such as a joint team effort with a male colleague, upon receiving positive feedback about the team’s performance, tend to give more credit to their male teammates and take less credit themselves except in extenuating circumstances such as if their role in achieving the desired outcome is unmistakably evident. Markedly women do not credit themselves less when their teammate is female. Women when they devalue their contributions to collaborative work are said to engage in a process termed as “attributional rationalization”, which is an attempt by a woman to rationalise her success in a milieu of negative perception of her own abilities both by herself and by others (ibid). An extension of this attributive process is to be seen in the context of promotions. Studies show that men get promoted on potential – the value attributed to them while women, whose attributional value is socially unknown and unrecognised are promoted on the basis of their actual performance.

Caryl Rivers and Rosalind C. Barnett (2013) have also argued that gender discrimination has evolved into subtle manifestations. According to them “It has simply gone underground, where it is more subtle, harder to spot, and often more dangerous than the old in-your-face bias” (Rivers and Barnett, 2013).

Second-Generation Bias

Second generation bias is the phrase used for those hidden biases against women in workplace in contemporary times that still persist in mutated forms in spite of countervailing legislative and executive measures. In the first generation of biases there was open prejudice through policy or practice. But when institutional policy or practice does not support bias rather it encourages diversity those biases that still remain are known as second generation biases. These are so subtle that they are harder to detect. These are a set of discriminatory behaviours perpetrated by actors who may
sometimes not even be conscious of such behaviours or intend the same. These gender practices however have the potential for much damage in the course of a woman’s career. Women can be both victims and be guilty of engaging in second generation bias. In an article in the Harvard Business Review (2013), authors Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb, say that “Second-generation bias … creates a context in which women fail to thrive or reach their full potential. Feeling less connected to one’s male colleagues, being advised to take a staff role to accommodate family, finding oneself excluded from consideration for key positions — all these situations reflect work structures and practices that put women at a disadvantage. Second-generation bias is embedded in stereotypes and organizational practices that can be hard to detect, but when people are made aware of it, they see possibilities for change” (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013).

The very idea of glass ceiling as a metaphor gets strengthened when we consider the pervasive presence and role of these second generation biases. This concept helps to regard glass cliff situation in new light. In higher job levels where there are fewer women they come under the gaze of sharper scrutiny and these hidden biases make the transition more challenging for women. According to the authors if women are made aware of these second generation biases they can become empowered to deal with those. The authors have provided illustrations of common second generation biases in operation. The low likability of successful women is one such. If a woman is competent and successful usually in an organisation not many men or women find her very likable. On the contrary if a man is considered competent and is successful too he is usually liked by both men and women. This shows the power of second generation biases in action. Similarly as aforementioned, studies have found that women are promoted on actual performance while men get picked based on perceptions of promise and potential.

**Career Orientation among Women**

A group of literature has attributed gendered glass ceiling to the lack of career orientation among the women themselves. A career orientation reflects the level of commitment a woman has towards her career. It requires and implies dedication, personal sacrifice and adherence to a planned career path. Career orientation for married women is compromised when a wife’s career is viewed as less important than her husband’s.
Career vs. Job

Usually when a woman has a job it is presumed that she has a career too. However, although employed women do have jobs they do not necessarily have meaningful careers. A woman’s career is typically predefined for her in relation to the male paradigm. A woman’s family roles especially as a wife and mother are often viewed as detrimental to her organisational leadership roles. Women have to straddle between being feminine and being successful at work. Studies have shown that even when women show as complete dedication to their careers as do men they still cannot crack the glass ceiling (Eagly and Carli, 2008). This becomes a vicious cycle for the women. When women come to realise that in any case they will not be able to reach their full career potential they turn instead to prioritising their homes over their careers.

An ILO Geneva study of 2004, found evidence that “occupational sex segregation based on firmly entrenched myths, sex stereotyping and a corporate culture restricting a woman’s career development often obliges women to prioritize family life over paid work” (ILO, 2004).

Furthermore, studies show that the definition of career itself is based on the male paradigm of continuity in job service but women have responsibilities that may necessitate breaks in employment and any definition of a career should reflect those too. A woman’s career must be understood in the context of her other roles (Mavin, 2001; Pringle and Dixon, 2003).

Opting Out

As a consequence of that women often choose to altogether opt out of their careers. Pamela Stone (2008) explores the phenomenon of women leaving their jobs when they are doing well in their careers. According to Stone the real reason why women often ‘choose’ to leave their jobs is because in fact they are left with no other choice. It is their attempt to resolve the dilemma of their multiple demanding responsibilities. She also holds the “privatised” nuclear families responsible for this crisis. Analysing the situations of successful women who quit their careers, Stone observes that opting out is the result of push and pull factors – being pushed by the labour market and pulled by the family – the woman is left with no choice but to opt
out. Stone urges the need for alternative definitions for career to take into its fold the multiple roles that a woman has to execute.

Through interviews with women professionals who left their jobs, Stone also looks at the part played by their significant others, their husbands and children, and by their uncompromising co-workers and often inflexible job environments in that decision. Stone concludes that career women are led to face the “reality of constraint” underlying the “rhetoric of choice”.

**Work-Life Balance**

Literature has also focused on the career-family dilemma component of the women’s lives. The term work-life balance is thought to have been brought into use in 1986 to refer to this very aspect. Interestingly the phrase glass ceiling too originated around the same time. This concept has gained prominence in recent years due to the changes in society and the workplace. Studies show that in middle class Indian homes the stereotype of the male sole breadwinner is no longer valid as women are increasingly required to work and support the family. Men and women alike have to participate to manage both work and family (Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000). In India various legislations such as The Factories Act, 1948, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and Employee State Insurance Act, 1948 regulate work conditions, specify working hours and leave provisions. IT companies in particular in India have a number of work-life balance initiatives to enhance their “Great Place to Work” value. They offer a range of incentives like five-day weeks, flexible timings, alternate work schedules, work-from-home options, excellent medical plans that cover all nominated dependents, child care, maternity, paternity benefits, stress relief seminars, informal meetings with seniors as mentors, family counselling etc. IT companies vie with one another in their performance on welfare parameters (Baral, and Bhargava, 2011).

Studies especially by psychologists and behaviour scientists have focused on the classic work vs. family conflict situation that career women face. Research recognises work-life balance as a bi-directional concept as work impinges on family and family also impinges on work (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa, 1991). This interface, though bidirectional is asymmetrical in nature. Usually it is due to the interference of
work on family life that conflict situations develop. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have mentioned the possibility of three types of conflict (a) “time-based” conflict, (b) “strain-based” conflict, and (c) “behavior-based” conflict. Time-based conflict as the term suggests occurs when time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in another role, strain-based conflict occurs when stress experienced during one role comes in the way of participating fully in another role, and behaviour-based conflict occurs when specific behaviours required in one role are incompatible with behavioural expectations of the other role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

According to the Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2011, (GDBA 2011) report brought out by the Hong Kong based Community Business, the situation in Asia is different from the west in terms of family. While in the rest of the world women have to compromise on their jobs for child care and family responsibilities, in Asia the situation is different but more complex. Due to jointness of the family form career women have support from parents and parents-in-law for childcare and therefore children are not the cause for women quitting their jobs. The report says that instead in India and China women in particular have the responsibility to care for the elderly in the family. Working women feel a sense of guilt that they are not able to live up to these responsibilities. According to the study it is daughterly guilt and not maternal guilt that holds women back. There is also the strong cultural disapproval of work related travel for women, along with gender biases in the workplace itself as well as exclusion from informal social networks that working women in Asia have to face. It is true that years of conditioning of women into lives of patriarchal servitude makes women feel guilt ridden when they prioritise personal and professional goals over family, and self-motivation may be seen as a sign of selfishness.

**Motivational Works**

Most glass ceiling studies in the workplace have suggestions for women managers to deal with workplace imbalances. This is because literature has emanated from the management and behavioural disciplines. The helplessness and frustration women in the face of an unfair system of occupational rewards has released a spate of self-help books spewed from the pens of management gurus, journalists and activists imparting wisdom to women on how to win this war where there are no rules. These primarily motivational books provide mechanisms for women to strategize their way
through organisations. These books are useful for the researcher in that they contain relevant statistical and anecdotal data, offer some psychological insights and in a sense highlight the magnitude and the gravity of the problem.

K. L. Johnson (2008) gives practical suggestions for how women could break through the glass ceiling. Johnson points out that only seven of the Fortune 500 companies have a woman as CEO or President, and nearly 20 per cent of them do not have any women at all in upper management. Johnson’s advice is meant for women who are not making headway in their careers or are just beginning their careers. According to her, women should learn to speak out for themselves and be receptive to change. The book has chapters with catchy titles such as, “The Alphas and the Betas: Personality Types,” “A Feminist Says What?” etc. which delineate steps for women to succeed in their careers.

Helene Lerner (2006), claims to be a “no-nonsense guide” for women to move ahead in their careers. This book offers a guide for taking calculated risks to achieve career goals. She has outlined six ‘action steps’ which reveal how through taking timely decisions and calculated risks a woman can make a “confident leap” to success. The book narrates success stories of successful women risk takers. According to Lerner, women need to learn how to actualise their true potential and improve their self-esteem through conscious effort on their part.

Linda Austin (2001), argues that the reason so few women are to be found in top managerial or professional positions is what she calls the “self-imposed” “psychological glass ceiling” that influences the decisions of women including those pertaining to their careers. Austin then goes on to enumerate eight “life-defining choices” that according to her determine the “ultimate level” of accomplishment of a woman in the organisation. According to the author the reason most women are under achievers in the workplace is due to restraints that women place upon themselves in order to conform to the wider social expectations of them. This according to the author is a psychological glass ceiling, which influences every decision women make in their lives.

Sian Griffiths (1996) is an inspirational work that carries narratives of forty successful women from across the globe in areas as diverse as computer science, physics, literature, philosophy, politics, law and anthropology, wherein they talk
about how they achieved their dreams, their lives, their hopes and beliefs and the problems they encountered and how they surmounted them.

Each of these motivational books comes armed with statistics. Some are rich with narratives and in that sense are a useful resource though not a necessarily a prime source of data. Though not texts in the academic sense these books are useful material to understand the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. Merton in his famous analysis of deviance had brought out certain responses that people adopt to deal with situations of disorganisation between societal values and the means to achieve them. Of these, innovation is one such response. Women are increasingly faced with a workplace situation whose value system they need to devise adaptations to. And these self-help books help them innovate to cope with their existing reality. In a way the presence of so many coffee table books itself offers evidence of the glass ceiling in existence. These books provide a catharsis for the women and give voice to their aggrieved frustration and motivate them through action plans and success stories of other achievers.

The View of the Sceptics

Not the entire glass ceiling related literature is to do with highlighting the presence of glass ceiling or showing probable cause for it, or recommendations to mitigate it. Anti-feminist works also abound. Mike Buchanan (2011) critiques what he calls the British pro women policy initiatives. According to the author, the under-representation of women in senior positions in business is not because of gender discrimination or glass ceilings. According to him it is individuals who are promoted to high levels and this is done through merit. If a woman has requisite talent she will undoubtedly succeed.

It is clear that even those who do not believe that the glass ceiling is the result of discrimination still concede that whatever may be the cause there are indeed fewer women than men at the top levels of any organisation.
Glass Ceiling in the IT Sector

If we look at literature specific to gender relations in the IT sector, we come to realise that there is enormous gender inequality in the information technology industry too. It would be thought that the IT sector due to its very nature would be different than conventional sectors when it came to the question of women. However, according to Amanda Haynes of the University of Limerick, Ireland, so far, it continues to maintain the same pattern of gender differences and sustain male supremacy (Haynes, 2006).

In a compilation of studies on the gender divide in the IT Sector, (2008) editors J. Mcgrath Cohoon and William Aspray point out that computers and technology are strikingly male-dominated. The book looks at the reasons for this and has suggested some strategies to remedy this imbalance. The studies included are inter-disciplinary social science investigations carrying empirical evidence. The work carries updated findings of both qualitative and quantitative studies. An important element in the work is the overview of the literature on the field. Mainly focusing on education, the book describes the relationship between gender and information technology among the youth, and discusses the how girls’ interest in computing differs from that of boys. It contains a comparative analysis of computer education and the various ways in which young men and women can enter the IT workforce.

The Indian IT Overview

Research specifically on IT Sector in India by Catalyst, world economic forum and several independent agencies including NASSCOM show consistently that females lag behind the men even in the field of technology. There is no qualitative difference between IT and other industries when it comes to the persistence of gender inequalities. As per data from the National Association of Software and Services Companies, NASSCOM, in the Indian software industry, male-female ratio was 76:24 according to 2005 figures. NASSCOM data for the financial year 2014 place the share of women in the total IT workforce to 35-38% (nasscom.in, 2014). This shows that there has not been significant improvement in the gender ratio in the past decade. This is in spite of the fact that more women are doing well educationally and graduating from engineering colleges, and women are said to find IT industry attractive as it offers the prospect of a sophisticated clean work environment, without needing to do
outstation duties in harsh environments. On the flip side however there is the problem of odd hour duties for outsourcing operations for clients across different time zones. On the whole the gender ratio in this sector remains lopsided. According to a study conducted by an executive search firm known as EMA Partners, in 2011, only 11% of 240 companies had women CEOs. Only 3% of the Fortune 500 companies have women CEOs (ema-partners.com). If we compare this ratio to the sex ratio of a country’s population we can appreciate the enormity of the disparity involved.

The Indian Workplace Scenario

Studies on Indian organisations have also highlighted the presence of gendered glass ceiling. Management scientist Sujoya Basu (2008) has emphasised the exclusion of women from top management levels in Indian organisations. She points out through studies that those women, who do make it past the glass ceiling, reach what Basu also calls the ‘second glass ceiling’. Basu further confirms the findings of Lyness and Thompson (1997) in the Indian context. She also elaborates that even when women are paid the same salary as the men they are given smaller units manage with fewer personnel, are given lesser stock options incentives and lucrative overseas assignments than men. Basu brings out a rather bleak picture with regard to equity for women in Indian corporates. According to her, glass ceiling for women is widespread in the Indian industry. Basu recommends a basic policy overhaul along with collective will for changing the mindset of people.

Basu’s findings are also supported by other studies on Indian industry. A 2009 survey conducted by the Forum for Women in Leadership and the audit firm KPMG, said women bring substantive diversity in terms of their composition, skill sets and experiences that qualitatively adds to the organisation’s strengths. Companies that nurture leadership qualities of their women executives see better performance and financial results. The survey reveals that women leaders are ethical and transparent in their leadership style. They are self-critical of their strengths and weaknesses and tend to rebound gracefully from setbacks. They tend to be intuitive crisis managers enabling fair and sound judgement. Further, they drive a democratic and inclusive approach by building an ecosystem and nurturing talent (WLL-KPMG Survey, 2009).

The “Millennium Development Goals Report 2012” of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted that fewer than 35 percent of women in
India and Pakistan do paid work. A lack of women's participation in the workforce, the report warned, costs such nations billions of dollars every year. According to its conservative estimates, the GDP could increase by 2 percent to 4 per cent annually if the employment rate of women grew to 70 percent (UNDP, 2012).

The latest Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia (GDBA) 2014 report by Community Business Diversity & Inclusion in Asia Network (DIAN) shows that of the six Asian countries companies from which were selected for the study, India is at the bottom rank. The study showed the average representation of women at different levels of management and in each level India has the lowest position among 32 participating companies from six Asian countries namely China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. According to the report the overall representation of women in the workforce in India is 26.6% which is less than half the representation of women in workforce in Malaysia, the top ranked economy with 58% women. Viewed by job levels the representation of women in workforce for India is 30.3% at junior levels, 16.4% at middle levels and only 10.6% at senior job levels. India has been referred to as the “worst performing geography” (gba2014.org). Table 2.1 shows the average representation of women at various levels and ranking. India stands at bottom on all levels.

Table 2.1: Representation of Women at Various Levels and Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONAL AVERAGE</th>
<th>Total Women Workforce % &amp; ranking</th>
<th>Junior Levels % &amp; ranking</th>
<th>Middle Levels % &amp; ranking</th>
<th>Senior Levels % &amp; ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>56.7 (2)</td>
<td>64.9 (1)</td>
<td>49.6 (2)</td>
<td>35.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>50.9 (3)</td>
<td>57.5 (5)</td>
<td>45.7 (3)</td>
<td>29.4 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>26.6 (6)</td>
<td>30.3 (6)</td>
<td>16.4 (6)</td>
<td>10.6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>42.6 (5)</td>
<td>59.2 (3)</td>
<td>28.4 (5)</td>
<td>11.0 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>58.1 (1)</td>
<td>63.0 (2)</td>
<td>50.3 (1)</td>
<td>34.0 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>48.2 (4)</td>
<td>58.5 (4)</td>
<td>40.6 (4)</td>
<td>23.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GDBA Report 2014

In an interview to the national daily, *The Times of India*, (Times News Network, March 8, 2011) Rajashree Birla, chairperson of the Aditya Birla Centre for
Community Initiatives and Rural Development had said that she did not believe that men and women face different set of challenges in the workplace. “I don't think so (that there is a glass ceiling), particularly when the company is a meritocracy. The only things that matter are - the values, competencies and unbridled passion. These are hygiene for both, men and women. If these are in place, then the sky is the limit” (ibid.).

Bangalore based writer Gita Aravamudan’s (2009) book of narratives fashioned out of interactions with women employees of Infosys, Satyam, Microsoft and other companies, dwells on the compulsions of Indian working women. There is a note of hope and optimism in her work as she highlights the achievements of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw whom she calls the “new-age techno-czarina”, to show that meritocracy and women can prevail through sheer dint of perseverance.

**Theorizing the Glass Ceiling**

After reviewing a gamut of relevant literature on the glass ceiling in its various manifestations and within the IT sector as well as studies on India, this segment of the chapter consists of a brief look at some theories that enable one to make sense of glass ceiling as has been thus far illustrated empirically and described conceptually. It explores some of the useful frameworks in sociological theory that can give form to the glass ceiling concept. In addition, various appropriate theories - micro and those of the middle range as well as sociological and philosophical perspectives are contextually described throughout the text.

Feminist thought has generated a body of theory to offer explanations for gender inequality. Feminism as an ideology provides the agenda for overcoming these inequalities. Some of these theories have implicated the core social structural formations such as patriarchy and capitalism to be the cause of inequality. Sociologist Ann Oakley in particular has focused upon these structures. Her thought based on the socialist framework explores and describes the feminine experience of living in a patriarchal society where a woman’s contribution to overall production gets often neglected. Oakley is concerned with the impact of gender barrier on the well-being of women. There is a consistency in Oakley’s work: Housewife, motherhood, post-natal depression, menopause etc., her principal preoccupation is with woman in her various
roles and life stages. Oakley’s socialist feminism links the inferior position of women to class based capitalism and its alignment with the patriarchal family in capitalist societies. The unpaid labour at home and the paid labour at work serve the patriarchal capitalism. Transposed to the domain of workplace relations it could provide a reference point for the analysis of the unequal relations among men and women in the workplace.

To understand the concept of the glass ceiling itself the structural formulations of Emile Durkheim are found useful. Glass ceiling can be meaningfully understood as a social fact. Durkheim defines social fact as “every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations” (Thompson, 2002: 42). When phenomena are observed as social facts they can be studied as data which then constitute the point of departure for sociological inquiry.

The value consensus – the broad agreement on values held by a society - construct of sociologist Talcott Parsons which is essentially the conscience collective of Durkheim transposed to contemporary settings, provides a framework for explaining the causes of this inequality. For, ultimately no institution can thrive unless it receives the agreement and support of the prevailing social values.

At a higher level of abstraction is Existentialist thought. Perhaps this is by far the most composite construction for capturing the underlying helplessness and anguish of being a woman in a predominantly male knowledge domain. According to existentialist philosophy, individuals have to take responsibility for their actions – only the individual can give meaning to ‘his’ ² life – and by doing so is able to ‘live’

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²The indeterminate masculine pronoun the generic ‘he’ is willy-nilly taken to be gender neutral and representative of all - women and men. But as the poet Tennyson wrote “But, friend, man-woman is not woman-man.” While writing the thesis as far as possible I have tried to avoid references to ‘he’ or ‘she’ and their various mutants by constructing sentences in alternative fashions. The use of annotations, like s/he or she/he clutters a sentence and takes away from the lucidity of the text and its ease of reading. Some people prefer substituting the standardised ‘he’ with ‘they’ or ‘them’ but this violates a classic rule of grammar that a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and gender, and not to mention the fact that it sounds absurd while reading. I was also tempted to employ ‘she’ instead of ‘he’ but two wrongs do not make a right! Left with no choice I have stuck to the baneful ‘he’ so that the content of my writing is not obscured by terminological skulduggery. When there is a true spirit of gender equality in society the English language will certainly come out of this archaism.
life meaningfully with passion and completeness surmounting all obstacles to existence such as ‘despair’, ‘angst’, ‘absurdity’, ‘alienation’ and ‘boredom’. According to existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, “freedom is existence, and in it existence precedes essence” … “man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world” (Sartre, 1946). Through the ‘free’ choices we make, we as human beings, can give meaning to and define the nature of our existence. Women in the IT industry ironically as the present research shows fall the victims of this ‘choice’.

Simone de Beauvoir has provided what can be called a Marxist-Existentialist-Feminist philosophy, one that evocatively represents the woman’s voice. In her *The Second Sex* often perceived as a landmark in feminist thought she brings out the feminists’ sense of injustice. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir brings into focus these existentialist problems of freedom and responsibility. There exists a dilemma between absolute freedom and the constraints of circumstance (Tidd, 2004).

It is in *The Second Sex* that Beauvoir makes her famous statement, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” For Beauvoir, what is to do with women is essentially to do with the social construction of women. In the same way what is to do with men is to do with the social construction of male hood; to be masculine is to be aggressive, competitive. This is a patriarchal construct of masculinity that not all men can always live up to. This construct denies men the chance to perceive of themselves as who they really are; it limits their life choices, their sexuality and their ability to connect emotionally with women and other men. When the woman is defined through the male standpoint, the woman becomes the indescribable “other” - she is not what she is but what she is made out to be.

The hierarchically superior group builds stereotypes about groups placed lower in hierarchy and ascribes characteristic traits to it. This is what happens to women in the world of men. Women become the deviant. They have to excel in domains owned by men and by the rules authored by them. In such a world view the women become the other in society. Women also get conditioned to consider men as

Furthermore, it bears clarifying that I have at times used the first person pronoun ‘I’ for similar reason of ease of reading and lucidity. Wherever possible I have used passive voice or plurals to avoid first person narrative. When sentences are frequently rendered in passive voice, or plural pronouns they appear convoluted and in some sense lacking in the attribute of taking responsibility for the ideas and thoughts expressed therein. The usage ‘I’ is not an instrument of self-aggrandizement rather it is representative of the humbling course of assuming responsibility for the contents of the thesis.
the norm and the male world view as the view - the ideal which they must emulate. We inhabit a world that consists of a culture conceptualised and crafted by men. The male is the subject, the standpoint from which the world is to be seen and defined. And the woman becomes the other, the object.

If we transpose these questions of existence into the domain of the workplace historically belonging to men, inhabited predominantly by men, where careers and rules are defined by men, it is little wonder that the woman in an attempt to emulate the man sometimes falls short. The question therefore is whether the woman can actualise herself from the state of other, liberate herself and attain subjectivity. In the ultimate analysis that essentially is the path to scale the glass ceiling.

Together these frameworks – the structural framework of Durkheim to describe the phenomenon of the glass ceiling and for observing it on the field; and the underlying philosophical reasoning derived from existentialism – provide the basis for the understanding of the glass ceiling inequality. In this manner in this thesis there has been an attempt to bring objectivity into the inquiry while retaining the essential subjective grounding of the social sciences.

Refining the Research Problem: Gaps in the Knowledge

Key Questions Revisited

An overview of the literature has enabled one to reformulate and give concrete shape to some of the key questions that arose at the onset of the research exercise. Some more questions got appended through a study of the literature. The key questions that resurface after survey of work are:

1. What is glass ceiling?
2. In what way is glass ceiling distinct from other forms of job inequalities?
3. Is there a glass ceiling in modern organisations such as those of the IT Sector?
4. Does the glass ceiling hypothesis have bearing in the Indian context?
5. What causes the glass ceiling to form- 
   - Factors within the organisation?
   - Factors outside the organisation: social and cultural?
Existing literature does answer some of these questions in part. But it also exposes us to the glaring gaps in knowledge. Each of these questions could be the starting point of a new research.

For the purpose of this enquiry the following crucial question which has considerable significance in the contemporary Indian context and has yet not been addressed, has been selected as the research problem. The question that is to form the core of the present research is, *Is there a glass ceiling for women in the IT Sector in India?* The intent then being to find a sociological answer.

Prima facie empirical evidence overpoweringly establishes the persistence of a glass ceiling in the workplace including that of the Information Technology Sector. However, there is little by way of sociological work on the theme. Most of the studies originate from the discipline of management. Some are in the form of self-help books exhorting women to go out there and conquer. While all academic works from the various social sciences, as well as certain journalistic and quality literary works do have some sociological content, these need to be distinguished from core sociological works. Studies have provided a wealth of data but there is little by way of theory. All empirical knowledge needs a theoretical foundation to rest on. A sociological study would necessarily go into the social causes of a phenomenon and relate it to a strand of sociological thought.

Studies are brimming with statistical proof of a glass ceiling. Statistical evidence can be much like circumstantial evidence in a crime – it shows that a crime has been committed but cannot conclusively establish the guilt. Yes, there is a markedly lower percentage of women in top management and that is as clear as anybody can see. But percentages do not establish causation, they only reveal the result.

It is held that the ultimate aim of science is to be able to predict. The pure sciences pride themselves on scoring over the social sciences in this regard. However, sometimes it is easier to be able to predict than explain. We all know for instance that an aspirin cures a headache but how many of us can actually explain how it can do so. Sometimes to be able to explain becomes the real test of a science.
The glass ceiling is the *effect*. It is the surface manifestation of possibly a far more complex sociological phenomenon. Evidential data overwhelmingly demonstrates the presence of the glass ceiling effect and no one can deny that. One cannot wish it away or sweep it under the carpet. Now what one as a student of sociology can do and needs to do, is to try and locate the *cause* for it - the underlying social processes that result in the glass ceiling. While numerous studies have demonstrated the gender gap in authority, virtually none of the research has addressed the specific question of how and why the relative probabilities of women and men being promoted into or entering a given level of management change as one moves up the hierarchy. Does the probability of women being promoted keep declining as one moves up the hierarchy? The research will seek to identify the factors in the organisational structure responsible for this at both formal and informal levels. It will also look at the extra-organisational linkages that act as barriers to a woman’s career growth viz. the family to which one belongs, socialisation, general societal and cultural factors. In the chapter that follows, the field of research – the state of Karnataka particularly in the context of the IT sector has been described in detail.
REFERENCES


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