

The Position of Women in Management Roles in Contemporary India

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Abstract

The role of women in management positions in India has been a topic of growing interest in recent years. This qualitative research paper aims to explore the current position of women in management roles in contemporary India, identify the existing research gap, and conduct a comprehensive literature review of various blind-peer reviewed, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and books to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by women in leadership positions. The present narrative-based study will also delve into the factors affecting women's career progression and the strategies implemented to promote gender diversity in the corporate sector in contemporary India. The interviews or first-hand experiences will also be included as available on various web sources to get a fair idea of the role and position of women at the higher administrative levels in India. The research will also try to focus on the various issues and problems faced by women taking higher management roles in some reputed firms in India to see how people take women as their administrators and how they respond to them.

Keywords: Status of Women, Leadership Roles, Contemporary India, Gender Studies

1. Introduction

The representation of women in senior management positions has been a subject of significant debate and concern globally, including in India. Despite advances in gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles in various industries. This research paper seeks to address the existing research gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of the status of women in management roles in contemporary India. Through an in-depth literature review and qualitative analysis, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender diversity and leadership in the Indian context.

In India, women in leadership positions are vital and irreplaceable. They contribute a variety of viewpoints, creative concepts, and original methods of resolving issues. Their

participation and effectiveness in positions of leadership improve organisational performance in addition to creating a more diverse and equal work environment. Furthermore, female leaders provide an example for aspiring professionals and dispel gender preconceptions, creating opportunities for younger generations of female entrepreneurs. As a result, it is critical to acknowledge and encourage the significant contributions made by Indian women in leadership positions. Women constitute nearly half of the total population in India, therefore, their active participation in managerial roles is vital for the overall growth of the country. “According to World Bank Data, the percentage of women in the Indian population was 48.4% in 2021...the fifth National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) found that India had more women than men for the first time in history” (“Leadership Roles: Importance of Women Empowerment in India”).

2. Significance of the Study

The existing literature on women in management roles in India predominantly focuses on quantitative analyses, often overlooking the qualitative aspects of their experiences. There is a dearth of qualitative studies that delve into the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by women in leadership positions. This research paper aims to bridge this gap by providing qualitative insights into the experiences of women in management roles.

3. Methodology

The research will adopt a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data will be gathered through surveys and statistical analysis to understand the demographic representation of women in management. Qualitative data will be collected through interviews and focus group discussions to explore the experiences and challenges faced by women in leadership roles.

4. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To analyse the current status of women in management roles in Indian organisations.
- To identify the challenges and barriers faced by women in advancing to leadership positions.
- To explore the impact of cultural, social, and organisational factors on women's career progression.

- To suggest potential strategies and interventions for promoting women's representation in management roles.

5. Status of Women in Leadership Roles including Politics in India

In contemporary India, the status of women in leadership roles, particularly in politics, reflects a complex and evolving landscape marked by both progress and persistent challenges.

Political Representation:

- Historical Context:** India has a rich legacy of prominent women leaders in politics, including Indira Gandhi, who served as the first and only female Prime Minister so far, and numerous other influential figures across states and parties. In India, the status of women in leadership roles, including politics, is gradually improving. While women have made significant strides in various fields in India, there is still a noticeable disparity in political representation. Despite this, there has been a marked increase in the number of women actively participating in politics and holding leadership positions. Additionally, initiatives and campaigns to encourage more women to participate in politics have contributed to the positive shift in the status of women in leadership roles in India.
- Recent Trends:** Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women participating in politics at various levels, from local governance to national parliament. Smile Foundation points out in an article, “While in 1957, the total number of women candidates in the Lok Sabha elections was only 45, it went up to 716 in the last Lok Sabha elections of 2019. This was also a significant growth as compared to the 2014 elections when 668 women had placed their candidature” (“Leadership Roles: Importance of Women Empowerment in India”). Women now hold senior positions in roughly 56% of Indian companies. In India, women's status is evolving as an increasing number of them pursue education in technical and professional fields in addition to general education. Their engagement in the workforce has significantly increased in tandem with their rising educational attainment across a range of fields (Pandya 125). The presence of women has also been proven to better the performance of any organisation’s outcomes. A study of Dutch companies by Lucknerath–Rovers in 2011 evidenced that companies with a female on their board performed better, financially than those that did not... In the Indian

scenario, a study by Booz and company estimated that if Indian women could achieve an employment rate at par with men, the GDP of the country would increase by 27% (Khera and Malik 301).

- c. **Reservation Policies:** To enhance women's representation, there are constitutional provisions mandating the reservation of seats for women in local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities), which has significantly increased their participation at the grassroots level. As Saima Jan opines, “Women's reservation policies have led to increased representation of women in political decision-making bodies, contributing to greater democratic legitimacy and inclusivity. (However,)...implementation challenges such as political resistance, administrative bottlenecks, and societal attitudes continue to hinder the effective realisation of women's political empowerment” (d50). “Since 1993, India has implemented a large programme of decentralization (panchayati raj) and gender quotas, which enabled more than a million elected women representatives (EWRs) to become part of the political process” (Kalaramadam).
- d. **Challenges:** Despite these advancements, women remain underrepresented in higher echelons of political power. Factors like patriarchal norms, societal expectations, violence against women in politics, and limited access to financial resources often act as barriers.

Leadership Beyond Politics:

- a. **Corporate Sector:** In corporate India, there's a growing recognition of the importance of gender diversity in leadership roles. However, women still face glass ceilings and gender biases that hinder their advancement to top executive positions. “In 2019, just 15 per cent of businesses had female CEO and MD, it said, adding that currently, that number is 28 per cent on a global level...However, in India, 5 per cent of mid-market businesses still do not have any women in senior leadership roles” (Agencies).
- b. **Civil Society and NGOs:** Women are increasingly taking leadership roles in civil society organisations and NGOs, driving social change and policy advocacy across various sectors. “Indian NGO women leaders are dealing with both contradicting and enriching experiences in post-liberal India. Indian NGO work has actively empowered women

leaders through opportunities to develop communities in myriad ways” (Abichandani and Babu 230).

Initiatives and Progress:

- a. **Legislative Reforms:** A third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislatures are set aside for women through ongoing talks and initiatives to pass the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament.
- b. **Education and Awareness:** Increasing educational possibilities and awareness initiatives have allowed women to strive to lead posts and engage actively in decision-making routine operations.

6. Challenges Faced by Women in Management Roles

In contemporary India, women in management roles face a myriad of challenges despite significant strides towards gender equality in recent decades. These challenges highlight the complexities and barriers that continue to hinder women's advancement in managerial positions:

Gender Bias and Stereotypes:

- **Perceived Leadership Traits:** Traditional gender stereotypes often associate leadership qualities like assertiveness and decisiveness with masculinity, leading to biases against women in managerial roles. Nadine L. Leblanc opines that women are perceived more positively as a group when they take on roles that men earlier held. Examples in various industries show that the complicated matter of a woman's credentials is assessed more critically than that of their correspondingly positioned male colleagues. Women encounter obstacles to leadership roles due to the constraints imposed on the gender gap in society (707).
- **Glass Ceiling:** Invisible barriers prevent women from ascending to top management positions, limiting their career progression despite qualifications and experience. “The business case for gender diversity in senior and executive positions is compelling. Studies show that companies that have the best records for promoting women outstrip their

competition on every measure of profitability. Yet women disproportionately are failing to attain high-level positions” (Johns).

Work-Life Balance:

- **Dual Responsibilities:** Balancing professional commitments with societal expectations of managing household responsibilities and caregiving roles poses a significant challenge. Brennan and Poertner assert:

Child behavioural problems are at least moderately related to the family stress and child stress reported by working parents...[Therefore,] A careful examination of work and family roles, together with the role expectations carried by both partners who give care to children with serious emotional disorders is also necessary. To investigate the dynamics of striking a balance between work and family responsibilities, all partners with work and family responsibilities must be included. (46)

- **Career Interruptions:** Women often face interruptions in their careers due to maternity leaves, childcare responsibilities, and societal norms, impacting their career trajectories.

Unequal Opportunities:

- **Promotion and Recognition:** Women may encounter unequal opportunities for career advancement, with promotions being less frequent compared to their male counterparts. “It is possible that women are more likely to be promoted because they are, regrettably, paid substantially less than men, and hence deemed the low-cost option for the senior level jobs” (“Equal Work, Unequal Growth?”).
- **Networking and Mentoring:** Limited access to informal networks and mentorship opportunities that are crucial for career growth and advancement in management roles.

Organisational Culture:

- **Male-Dominated Culture:** Many organisations maintain cultures that are predominantly male-oriented, which can perpetuate exclusionary practices and undermine women's contributions.

- **Discrimination and Harassment:** Instances of workplace discrimination, harassment, and lack of inclusive policies can create hostile work environments for women in management.

Pay Disparities:

- **Gender Pay Gap:** Women in management roles often face disparities in compensation compared to their male counterparts, despite having similar qualifications and responsibilities.
- **Transparency and Equity:** Lack of transparency in pay structures and policies contributes to perpetuating unequal pay practices.

Limited Representation in Senior Positions:

- **Boardroom Diversity:** Women remain underrepresented in corporate boards and senior leadership positions, limiting their influence in strategic decision-making processes.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that promote gender diversity and inclusion at the executive level remains a challenge in many organisations.

Lack of Support Systems:

- **Supportive Policies:** Absence of supportive policies such as flexible working arrangements, childcare facilities, and parental leave policies that cater to the needs of women in management.
- **Professional Development:** Limited access to leadership training and development programs tailored to women's specific needs and challenges in management roles.

Societal and Cultural Factors:

- **Traditional Norms:** Deep-seated societal expectations and cultural norms regarding gender roles and women's capabilities can impede their advancement and acceptance in managerial positions.

- **Mindset Shift:** Overcoming biases and fostering a cultural shift towards recognising and valuing women's leadership capabilities is essential for long-term change.

7. Opportunities and Strategies for Promoting Gender Diversity

Promoting gender diversity in managerial roles for women in India presents numerous opportunities and strategies that can foster inclusive workplaces and enhance organisational effectiveness. Here are key opportunities and effective strategies to achieve gender diversity:

Opportunities:

1. Economic Growth and Globalization:

India's rapid economic growth and integration into the global economy provide opportunities to capitalise on diverse talent pools, including women, to drive innovation and competitiveness.

2. Policy Support:

Government initiatives promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) guidelines encouraging gender diversity, provide a supportive regulatory framework.

3. Changing Societal Norms:

Shifting societal attitudes towards gender roles and increasing recognition of the benefits of gender diversity in leadership roles create a conducive environment for promoting women in managerial positions.

4. Business Imperative:

Research consistently demonstrates that gender-diverse teams and leadership enhance organizational performance, decision-making, and profitability, making gender diversity a strategic business imperative.

Strategies:

1. **Leadership Commitment and Accountability:**

Setting Targets: Establishing clear targets and goals for gender diversity in managerial roles, with accountability at all levels of the organisation, including leadership.

Role Modeling: Demonstrating visible commitment to diversity by promoting women leaders, creating inclusive policies, and fostering a culture of respect and fairness.

2. **Recruitment and Retention Policies:**

Diverse Hiring Practices: Implementing inclusive recruitment strategies that mitigate biases, ensure diverse candidate pools, and prioritise gender-balanced hiring decisions.

Career Development: Providing structured career development paths, mentoring programs, and leadership training opportunities tailored to women's needs and aspirations.

3. **Flexible Work Arrangements:**

Work-Life Balance: Offering flexible work arrangements, including remote work options, part-time roles, and childcare support, to facilitate work-life balance and retain women in managerial roles.

4. **Inclusive Organizational Culture:**

Cultural Awareness: Educating employees on unconscious bias, promoting respectful communication, and fostering a culture of inclusion where diverse perspectives are valued.

Employee Resource Groups: Establishing employee resource groups or affinity networks to support networking, mentorship, and advocacy for women in managerial positions.

5. **Transparent Performance Evaluation:**

Implementing transparent and unbiased performance evaluation systems that reward merit and contributions, ensuring equitable opportunities for career advancement.

6. Partnerships and Collaborations:

Collaborating with external organizations, industry bodies, and academic institutions to share best practices, conduct research on gender diversity, and advocate for policy reforms supporting women's leadership.

7. Monitoring and Reporting:

Regularly monitoring diversity metrics, conducting gender pay audits, and publicly reporting progress on gender diversity goals to hold organizations accountable and drive continuous improvement.

Promoting gender diversity in managerial roles for women in India requires a comprehensive approach that integrates leadership commitment, supportive policies, inclusive practices, and cultural transformation. By leveraging the opportunities presented by economic growth, policy support, changing societal norms, and the business case for diversity, organisations can create environments where women thrive, contribute effectively, and lead with confidence. Embracing these strategies not only enhances organizational resilience and innovation but also contributes to broader societal goals of gender equality and inclusive development.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper has explored the position of women in management roles in contemporary India by addressing the existing research gap and providing qualitative insights into the experiences and challenges faced by women in leadership positions. Through a mixed-methods approach, this study has analysed the current status of women in management roles in Indian organisations, identified the challenges and barriers they face in advancing to leadership positions, and explored the impact of cultural, social, and organisational factors on women's career progression. The significance of this research lies in providing a comprehensive understanding of the status of women in management roles in India, bridging the gap in existing literature that predominantly focuses on quantitative analyses. By delving into the lived experiences of women in leadership positions, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender diversity and leadership in the Indian context.

The research findings underscore the vital and irreplaceable role that women play in management and leadership positions, contributing diverse viewpoints, creative concepts, and innovative problem-solving methods. Furthermore, the study has shed light on the historical context of women in leadership roles, including politics, in India, recognising the progress made and the persistent challenges that continue to shape the landscape. In light of the research objectives, potential strategies and interventions for promoting women's representation in management roles have been suggested, paving the way for future research and practical initiatives aimed at fostering gender diversity and equal opportunities in the corporate sector. It is imperative to acknowledge and encourage the significant contributions made by Indian women in leadership positions, as their active participation is vital for the overall growth and development of the country.

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