

Glass Ceiling in Indian Contemporary Art

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Date of Submission: 29-09-2021

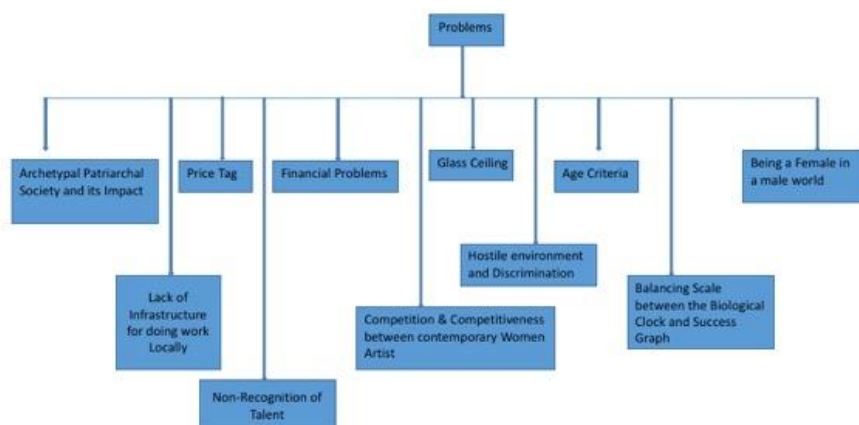
Date of Acceptance: 13-10-2021

In today's world of globalization one cannot see identity as an isolated concept, it becomes important to see it in the national as well as global context. Since the age of the internet, the fastest moving thing is thought and information dissemination. Problems that a woman faces in the current world are all based on the mentality that has developed through time. The woman has been taken to be a fragile object that belongs to a man, she is either a daughter, a sister, a wife, or a mother who has to be protected from all the negativities and evils in the society. It is these negatives that become the biggest problems of the modern day woman in general, the list is endless, however to count a few obstacles, that are a hindrance, a list follows: -

- Obscurity in the market;
- Parental / Family biases;
- No work after marriage;
- Domestic violence;
- The rampant practice of Dowry;
- Sexual harassment;
- Sexual abuse by family members;
- Voice on mute;
- Eve teasing;
- Rape and molestation

In addition to the above the below mentioned problems are faced by the practicing Artist: -

Classification Table 6.1



6.1.1 Archetypal Patriarchal Society and its Impact

We are living in an archetypal patriarchal society and the theory of nature versus culture is prevalent even in the creative fields. What I mean by this is that all the mundane domestic chores and other works are done by a female since it is considered to be her forte for example cooking, tailoring, managing the house both financially and human resource wise. However, when we come to the centre stage of the world the man lauded as a hero takes up most successful professions like the corporate head honchos, fashion designers or managers

of multinational companies are men. Even our art history says great artists are men. As Linda Nochlin states, "The question "Why have there been no great women artists?" is simply the tip of the iceberg of misinterpretation and misconception; beneath it lies a vast dark bulk of shaky ideas recues about the nature of art and its situational concomitants, about the nature of human abilities in general and of human excellence in particular, and the role that the social order plays in all of this. While the "woman problem" as such may be a pseudo-issue, the misconceptions involved in the question "Why have there been no great women artists?" points to major areas of intellectual obfuscation beyond the specific political and ideological issues involved in the subjection of women. Basic to the question are many naive, distorted, uncritical assumptions about the making of art in general, as well as the making of great art... The question "Why have there been no great women artists?" has led us to the conclusion, so far, that art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, "influenced" by previous artists, and, more vaguely and superficially, by "social forces," but rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situations, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.'¹

The women are treated as nature's pristine, beautiful, delicate, soft and charming gifts, more ideal to be the painting than painting. Erotically stimulated, sexually charged the nude became the female, and whenever it was a male it came with a homosexual story attached to it.

6.1.2 Lack of infrastructure for doing work locally: Most women artists have to remain restricted to their locality due to family commitments and many a time the lack of infrastructure leads to either the artist discontinuing her practice or changes her style of work. As traditional a woman has to leave her parental house and move into the groom's setup, it is her who has to compromise and make changes to her career and lifestyle. The change in set up specially in the case of women artist working with large scale works or installation leads to her struggle in finding the right fabricators, which in turn leads to her either compromising in her quality of work or completely change in her style of working.

6.1.3 Financial problems: Many a times it is the number of commitments that one has in a family that leads to dropping a lot of ideas. The family is reluctant to invest in the works of the female artist since they treat is a long-term investment or mostly a bad debt. Most women artist who are married into the traditional households are unable to market their artworks and hence it becomes a vicious circle ending up in reducing their output and finally putting an end to their practice.

6.1.4 Hostile environment and discrimination

Many women after marriage realize that the family does not accept their practice as professional rather they accept it as a hobby or an ideal past time. Many a times even when there is family or peer support for their creative endeavour it is half-hearted. Many a time the hostility is visible in many work sectors for example a performing artist is considered to have retired after marriage, or a corporate head is considered that after marriage she will not be as dynamic as before due to various commitments the list is unending.

6.1.5 Non-recognition of talents

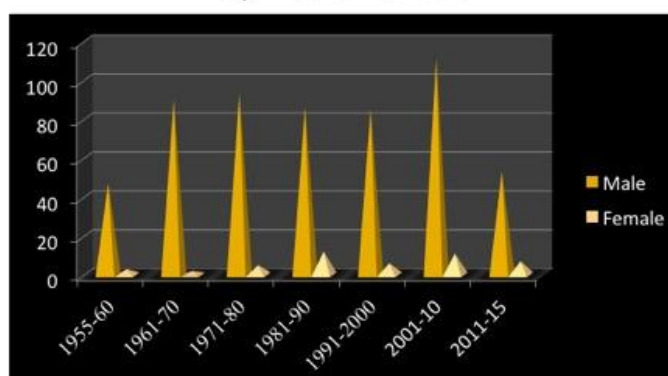
Most art promoters are skeptical in investing in a female artist's work due to the fear that they might not continue in the field. Most female artist feel that their work is not upto the mark as compared to their male peers of their peer male artist since they do not receive the due appreciation for their work from college level. This constant neglect makes the female artist insecure and she fears to bring her work in front of audience and stops participating in exhibitions and major shows, It raises a few questions like what is the pillar of support to the women artist if not themselves in the contemporary art scene, is each step they take towards success also a step backwards.

To look at the status of recognition to women artists let us look at the basic or gender ratio of the National level Awards conferred by the Lalit Kala Akademi, The National Academy of Art in India. As per the first Annual Report of the Lalit Kala Akademi mentioned National Academy of Art as one of the most important events of the Akademi and directed towards bringing forth the best in contemporary Indian art and thus afford an opportunity for the people to have an experience of Contemporary Art. The Akademi awarded 17 awards in its first year of which 15 were males and 2 were females. Between 1981-1990 12 women artist were awarded with the National exhibition. And slowly but steady the ratio is improving with 7 women artist already awarded in 2011-15

¹Extract from *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, Westview Press, 1988 by Linda Nochlin, pp.147- 158

Survey Table 6.1

National Award winners Gender Representation



Source: Catalogues National exhibition of Art Since 1955-2015

6.1.6 Competition and competitiveness between contemporary women artists

One of the major reasons is that women artists themselves are not organized, on the contrary they are fighting against each other in the cut-throat manner. The women artists are themselves downgrading their contemporary female peers. Even if an artist comes to know of international opportunities mostly they try to keep it to themselves fearing competition and failure. It is rightly said that it is a woman who is women's worst enemy. Unless this mind set is not changed the changes in society will come very slowly.

6.1.7 Balancing the scale between the biological clock and the success graph

Most women artists have gaps in their profession due to childbirth and child support. Living in a nuclear family there is very little support in the contemporary society for a female artist during these times. Many female artists delay their decision to have a child since they feel it will hinder their career growth. Sometimes these decisions leave the artist unsatisfied in both their professional and personal life.

'In other words, woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male on the other hand, lacking natural creative functions must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables-human beings."²

6.1.8 Age Criteria

Most women artists felt that they needed to be above 35 years of age to be accepted by the art market as a serious practicing artist. Not only that, most women artists are not taken seriously by most galleries unless they have completed their post-graduation in their chosen field, whereas when it comes to a male artist it is sufficient for him to say he is an artist, his declaration becomes the Bible whereas for a female artist she continues to practice for years and struggles at all levels before she achieves recognition.

6.1.9 Price tags

The female artist sells at a lesser price than her male contemporaries. Whether it is the auctions or camps or any opportunity for grants, the ratio between male and female artists has a huge gap. This is not just apparent in the culture field but is also visible as the gender pay gap. Even if you just compare the cost of the Georgia O'Keeffe's work *Weed/ White Flower No 1*(1932) which sold as \$44.4 million in comparison to the work of Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*(1955) at \$ 179 Million in 2015 Auction of the Christies³.

6.1.10 Being a female in a male world

One of the biggest paradoxes in today's contemporary female artist's life is finding their foot hold in a man's world. As Sherry B Ortner states, "It would take denial of all culture tradition for women to produce even

²Extract from *Feminism-Art-Theory An Anthology 1968-2000*, Blackwell Publisher, 2001 Ed by Hilary Robinson, pg.23

³<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-the-100-most-expensive-artists>

a true 'female' art. For a woman who participates in (male) culture must achieve and be rated by standards of a tradition she has no part in making - and certainly there is no room in that tradition for a female view, even if she could discover what it was.⁴

6.1.11 Glass ceiling

Glass ceiling is a concept which talks about the invisible barrier that females experience after a certain level of growth. They are able to identify avenues for promotion however are not considered for the same in comparison to their male counterparts. This is especially visible in the field of culture where male performers and artists are more likely to win awards and gain representations in comparison to women artists.

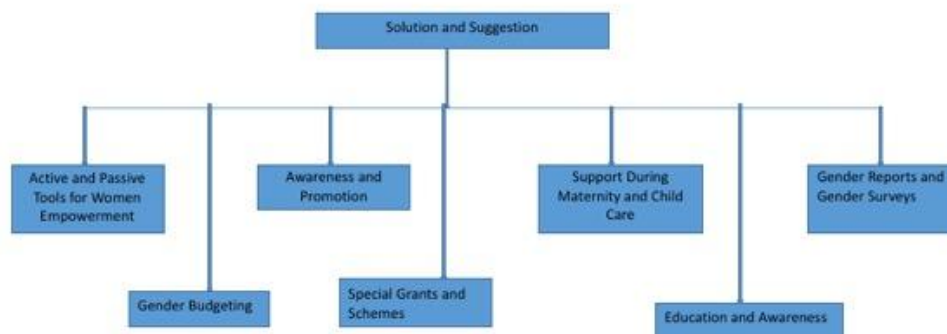
As stated in the report of United Nations Development HDI report of 2016 the effect of glass ceiling still exists, the text is reproduced as, “The glass ceiling, though cracked in many places, is far from being shattered. Gender requirements in selection and recruitment and incentive mechanisms for retention can enhance women’s representation in the public and private sectors. The criteria for promoting men and women into senior management positions should be identical, based on equal pay for equal work. Mentoring, coaching and sponsoring can empower women in the workplace by using successful female senior managers as role models and as sponsors.”

6.2 Solutions and suggestions

The solution of women empowerment cannot be based just on capability it has to be based on opportunity. In the current situations we need to give wider opportunities to our peers to be able to bring to the front. In addition to give due recognition to those women who have made a mark in their chosen field.

Following are few of the solutions available to women in India and suggestions which can be made available in addition to the current solutions :-

Classification Table: 6.2



⁴Extract from Feminism-Art-Theory An Anthology 1968-2000, Blackwell Publisher, 2001 Ed by Hilary Robinson, pg.15

Survey Table 6.2

United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report Extract

HDI rank	Country	Gender Development Index		Human Development Index (HDI)		Life expectancy at birth (years)		Expected years of schooling (years)		Mean years of schooling (years)		Estimated gross national income per capita (2011 PPP \$)	
		Value	Group	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
131	India	0.819	5	0.549	0.651	70.1	69.9	11.9	11.3	4.8	8.2	2184	8897

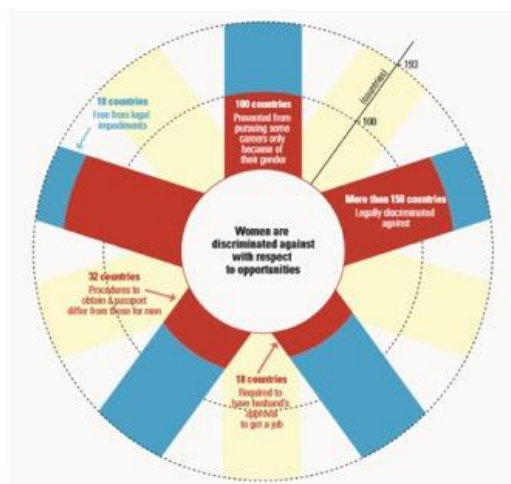
Source: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf

6.2.2 Gender Budgeting

Gender budgeting is an active tool that the Government of India has adopted in allocating resources to transform the gender inequalities into gender mainstreaming. However, most gender budgeting is optional due to which it is not creating the impact that should be revolutionary. With 48% of the total population of our country being women it is unfortunate that they are underrepresented and lag behind in social indicators like health, education etc. There is a lack of opportunity for the women as per the survey done by the Human Development Resource Office (HDRO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the Discrimination against women with respect to opportunity is as follows:-

Survey Table:6.3

Women are discriminated against with respect to opportunity



Source: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf

6.2.3 Awareness and promotion

Russell Storer, senior curator at the National Gallery in Singapore. “Curators need to become aware of what women are doing, how women are working, the kind of ideas and interests that women are dealing with, and that can be quite different to what male artists are doing.” This is not affirmative action curating, it’s smart curating.

As a practicing artist, most female artists in the survey felt that supporting each other in their practice is one very important passive tool and aspect of development. We as artists need to be aware of our contemporary female artists and support each other with opportunities, respect and promotion.

6.2.4 Special grants and scheme

Special grants can be set aside to promote women artists. Major commissions for buildings etc. can have a certain amount earmarked for women works. The organizations that are working for women empowerment must introduce special grants scholarships and fellowships for women at all levels. Each school and university must promote such awards for outstanding female students to promote their growth.

6.2.5 Support during maternity and childcare

It is the natural maternal instinct of a woman to be with her child to support and nurture after childbirth, the human child being the most dependent of all mammals. Therefore, supporting a female whether it is at a professional level or at a freelance level are both equally important. This support is expected not just from family but from the society at large. Even as per the suggestion of the Human Development Resource Office (HDRO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) HDI report 2016 the suggested changes are as, “Women also have to juggle paid employment outside the home and unpaid caregiving inside the home as well as balance their productive and reproductive roles. Flexible working arrangements and enlarged care options, including daycare centres, afterschool programmes, senior citizen homes and long-term care facilities, can help women broaden their choices.”

6.2.6 Education and Awareness

Education and awareness will always be the primary tool for the upliftment and empowerment of any society. Whenever the women have actively participated in the academic life it has been the golden era not only for women but for the country at large. As mentioned previously there are gaps in the education of women in general currently as per the survey done by the Human Development Resource Office (HDRO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India stands at 131 number, the ratio of mean years of schooling is 4.8 for women and 8.2 for man. The is a difference being almost double, this difference needs to be rectified if we wish to empower our women. Since basic education must be mandatory for all without differentiation of caste, creed, religion or gender.

6.2.7 Gender reports and Gender Surveys

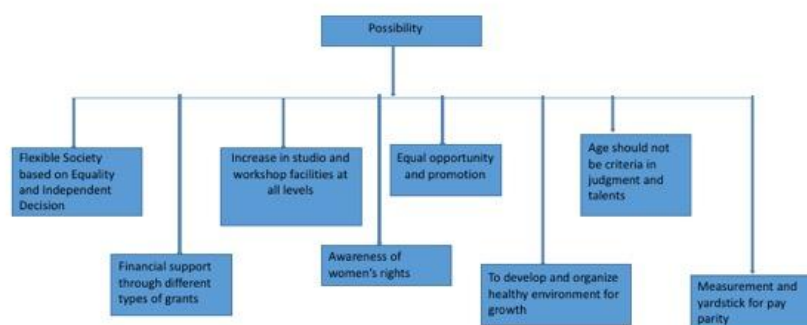
More and more surveys are needed in this line, awareness about peers, juniors and the class of female artists that have been there earlier, one are all important. Gender surveys in the Art fraternity are very important so are the are yardsticks to identity gender parity and the status where we have reached. This constant cracking of the surface can only lead to humanism where every individual is accessed for their capability. Such surveys are needed not just cross country but also at the smallest, micro levels. They just don't add figures they create awareness which in turn leads to change.

6.3 Possibilities

George Bernard Shaw stated that, “The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react”. There is always a possibility and a solution for every problem that is there in our society. Every day is a new beginning and Art is a sector which is infused with possibilities and growth. As it is a metaphysical activity just as Jeff Koons has said that, “Art's a very metaphysical activity. It's something that enriches the parameters of your life, the possibilities of being, and you touch transcendence and you change your life. And you want to change the life of others, too. That's why people are involved with art.”⁵ The feminist artist constantly work on this concept to remind us that our rights are for us to fight, we must never dilute our concentration off our goal of liberation or all that has been gained in the past 63 years will be lost in vain. The following are the main possibilities derived out of the problems faced by women artists.

⁵ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jeff_koons_550639

Classification Table:6.3



- **Flexible society based on equality and independent decision:** It is important to follow a system in society since without any order the whole society will crumble, however what is necessary is that no system must be made rigid. Flexibility is the stepping stone to change. Keeping this in mind we must create a world where everyone is independent to take decisions in life and everyone is equal.
- **Financial support through different types of grants:** There are many grants that are available both through private and government sectors, however, they need to be publicized well in time. Further there should be a provision where practicing women should be given financial support specially during child bearing and the early years of child care.
- **Increase in studio and workshop facilities at all levels:** The infrastructure of the country is mandatory for the development of its people. It is the responsibility of the Government to provide basic infrastructure at all levels whether it is the mainland or the hinterland.
- **Awareness of women's rights:** It is important that women are made aware of their rights. It is only through awareness that they be able to stand for their selves, not only women even men should be sensitized about woman rights so that there is no harassment. Regular workshops must be conducted of woman rights and harassment to empower the female from grassroots level.
- **Equal opportunity and promotion:** Gender pay parity and equal opportunity is a mandatory step towards equality. Skill development and specialized training programmes must be conducted at regular intervals to develop equality amongst employees.
- **To develop and organize healthy environment for growth:** It is very important to develop a healthy and safe environment both at home and at work spaces. It is only possible through stricter laws and timely justice. Delayed justice is equivalent to denied justice. Cases where the woman is oppressed whether at home or anywhere else must be given protection, the oppressors must fear punishment only then can we create a healthy environment for growth.
- **Age should not be criteria in judgment and talents:** one must be acknowledged for one's capability-factors like age and gender must not interfere in such decisions. We have example of children doing very brilliantly in their subjects however they are not promoted due to their age, which later leads to them performing badly since they have not been supported at the right time. Children with outstanding abilities must be identified at school level and should be promoted.
- **Measurement and yardstick for pay parity:** All sectors should be transparent in their submission of employees' statistics and the Government must make corrective measures to the erring organizations to give equal opportunity and pay parity to both the genders.

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DR. Gayatri Mathur. "Glass Ceiling in Indian Contemporary Art." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(10), 2021, pp. 25-32.