



Women leadership in India: A case study of Arundhati Bhattacharya in SBI

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Abstract

Women's leadership is an embarked example of the upliftment of the economic, social, and political status of women in society, who were underprivileged and perceived as a home makers little to do with economy or commerce. But in today's India the vision towards women is changing, now they are sharing equal platforms in every field. Moreover, they are proving themselves as a leader who often excels and can improve the productivity, creativity, performance, and collaboration of a company. The inborn qualities of women Kindness, Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence, Communication skills, Resilience, and Creativity can result in a more inclusive workplace and better performance of a company, and can also have a strong impact on society. Women are facing a lot of challenges in the workplace such as unconscious bias, unequal pay, gender-based harassment, and managing work and family responsibilities. This provokes to come out of stereotypes and create role models for future generations. Women's leadership can be considered an important factor in economic development and gender equality in a country. This research paper focuses on the Leadership of Arundhati Bhattacharya in SBI and its impact on it as well as on society as a whole through exploratory case study.

Keywords: Women leadership, equality, opportunity, women development

Introduction

In Earlier times, women are considered as weaker sex and always kept next to men. The traditional set up of Indian society is a male dominated one where women were exploited through every possible means. They have suffered a lot of criticism, lacked of freedom and even deprived of the basic birthrights of a human being. In the basic family structure women treated as a subordinate and executor of male decision.

The Transformation of the women from their limitation of household activities at the premises of civilization to being today able to figure among the most powerful and influential personalities on the planet, the status of women has gradually evolved through ages. The world we experiencing today is drastically different from the world our parents experienced. Increase in women education and varied aspirations for better living provoked a change in the lifestyle of Indian women.

Traditionally, women generally have been found in low productive sector such as agriculture and household activities. The Human Development Report 2004 ranked India 103 in (GDI) Gender related Development Index. Out of this the total 72% were engaged in agriculture, 21.7% in other non agriculture pursuit with only 6.3% in household industries. Due to their low level of skill and incapable of independent decision making were made them not to believe as leader and door of opportunity is close for them. In recent years family dynamics have evolved, and the society is being shaped by the gender equality where women can also enjoy the same opportunities rights and obligation in all sphere of life. Now, women are coming forth to the business arena as a leader. The basic character of women are being valued, they considered as Shakti which means source of power, they have the capabilities of effectively coordinating the available factors and resources, they have patience and bearing the suffering on behalf others and ability to work physically more at any age these qualities worth them as leader. Women who are leading as leader, have provide a

different set of skills and imaginative perspectives. More importantly, female leaders bring structural and cultural differences to the table, which drive effective solutions. This creative standpoint and unique sense of awareness also allow them to study and uncover the finer details that may go unmissed by others.

There can be a significant impact on society as a whole from having more women in leadership roles in business. Globally, the percentage of women in senior executive positions increased to 29% in 2019. This stayed the same in 2020 and increased to 31% in 2021—the highest percentage ever noted. Although this is encouraging, women who are just starting their careers should look up to the women who are already thriving in leadership positions. Once accomplished, it can serve as a blueprint for other ambitious young women leaders, enabling them to raise the global percentage and set new benchmarks.

The Companies Act of 2013 was a key factor in India's progress toward gender diversity in the corporate sphere. It required the presence of a minimum of one female director on specific corporate board categories, which led to a notable shift in the representation of women in corporate leadership. It takes more than merely hitting targets to create an atmosphere that values talent, merit, and a range of viewpoints. It is a story of transformation that helps industry as well as society at large, paving the way for a more just and forward-thinking India. The people who are best encapsulating modern India and influencing the country's future are people like Nirmala Sitaraman, Nita Ambani, Roshni Nadar, and Soma Mondal.

Societies in which women take on leadership positions on equal footing are not only upright societies but also better, more successful, with more talent, more potential, and more intergenerational equality. Women's leadership has also contributed to India's economic growth. As entrepreneurs, business leaders, and professionals, women have played a crucial role in various sectors, driving innovation, and creating employment opportunities.

Literature review

Tandon, S *et al* (2007) ^[4] have conducted the study on various barrier faced by women in leadership position in academic dentistry in India and data is collected through questionnaire. He came up with the result the positive side shows that there has been a change in outlook of Indian women as they broken the traditional norms and taken up career in academic dentistry but the downfall side indicates the numerous challenges in the form of family commitments are still remain for women leadership position in the dental college in India. The paper also suggested the issues which require global concern for unbiased advancement of women. Rani, K.S (2021) ^[2] this research paper examined the historical profile of Indian women and the need of women empowerment in India, and also highlighted the government schemes for women empowerment.

Yadav, A & Kumar, N (2021) ^[5] have done the review on the role of women in today's society and came up with women has changed tremendously and they have been able to create positive impression in the society. They have established themselves socially, politically and economically fit in almost every field.

Kakade, K.S *et al* (2024) ^[1] have examined the role of women leadership in environment management and emphasize the various disciplines in which they can participate and can made valuable contribution. The paper also highlights the challenges faced by the women leaders in environmental management.

Satyanarayan, G & Devi, S.A have investigated the women entrepreneurship in India through the case a study on Swarna Jyothi Mahila Samakhya (SHG) in Warangal district of A.P. The paper focused on the need of women Entrepreneur in India and the role played by them in economic growth of the country.

Need of the hour

India aspires to increase its GDP by 8% by 2030, but in order to do so, female labor participation and upskilling must be given top attention. Long-term economic growth is anchored by fiscal policy, infrastructure spending, women's labor force participation, and a commitment to improving the skill levels of all working individuals.

As per the 2022–2023 Periodic Labour Force Survey Report. In 2023, the percentage of women who are employed reached 37%. This increase represents a constructive change toward women's economic empowerment and increased economic inclusion, creating a more dynamic and diversified labor market. Furthermore, India can assure its labor force's flexibility to the economy's rapid evolution while simultaneously increasing productivity by investing in skill development and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

In addition to strengthening the basis of economic growth, this dual approach will propel a revolutionary wave of efficiency and innovation across all industries. There is little doubt that the country will achieve its lofty GDP objective thanks to the engagement of women and a trained workforce.

Gender parity in business boardrooms is another area where women need to be leaders. India has made great strides in this direction, but there is still a long way to go. It is critical to continue activities aimed at elevating women into leadership positions in order to fully realize the strategic and economic benefits of gender diversity.

Organizations are able to implement a variety of strategic initiatives. The most important of these is the introduction of leadership development and mentoring programs created especially to assist and develop female professionals. These kinds of programs are a crucial component of women's empowerment since they give them the abilities and self-assurance needed to go up the corporate ladder and into leadership roles. Companies can also take the initiative to promote gender diversity by actively supporting the creation of support and networking organizations that are specifically designed for women in leadership positions. These discussion boards offer a priceless venue for female professionals to share insights, offer advice, and foster one another's career advancement.

Objectives

1. To study the leadership role of Ms Arundhati Bhattacharya in SBI.
2. To study the impact of her leadership on young female generation.
3. To study the overall impact on society.
4. To study the challenges confronts by women leaders.

Qualities required for leadership

A good leader should have the vision, passion, integrity, self awareness and the most important is the communicating skill to influence others and should have the ability to create emotional bonds and harmony in pursuance of achieving the goal.

1. Self-awareness

Being humble and self-aware are essential traits of a leader because they enable them to see their own advantages and disadvantages, blind spots, and adapt their style of leadership to various circumstances.

2. Respect

Respecting others is one of the most crucial things a leader can do because it fosters a sense of community among coworkers. Additionally, it promotes efficacy, builds trust, and lessens stress and conflict. Although there are many various ways to demonstrate respect, it usually begins with demonstrating your genuine appreciation for other people's viewpoints and trying to foster an atmosphere that values inclusion, diversity, and equity.

3. Compassion

One of the most potent and significant behaviors in leadership is compassion, which strengthens bonds between leaders and their teams by encouraging cooperation, fostering trust, and raising worker output. It takes more than just listening and trying to understand others, or even just demonstrating empathy, as compassion calls on leaders to put what they learn into practice. If their boss doesn't act on the information they have spoken up about or voiced concerns about, they won't feel like they have been heard.

4. Vision

A leader's well-defined and well-organized vision is the key to success. To inspire and direct staff toward the objective and win their commitment to achieving it, any company or organization needs great leadership. Knowing what the team is aiming for helps them concentrate on the tasks at hand, reduces outside distractions, and keeps them motivated to meet deadlines and accomplish their objectives.

5. Communication

There is a relationship between effective leadership and effective communication. The most effective leaders are adept communicators who can convey information, tell stories, and request feedback, among other communication techniques. They have good communication skills with a wide spectrum of individuals from various backgrounds, positions, levels, locations, and more, both in writing and vocally. The efficiency and quality of communication among organizational leaders has a direct impact on corporate success.

6. Learning agility

Learning agility, or the capacity to adjust to changes, educate oneself, and make sense of strange situations, is a crucial leadership attribute. Effective leaders are able to adjust to changing circumstances and inspire their workers to think outside the box. Anyone can, with deliberate practice and effort, cultivate and enhance learning agility. Excellent leaders are, after all, truly excellent learners.

7. Collaboration

Collaborative leadership, where leaders can collaborate with a range of colleagues of varied identities, regions, positions, and experiences, is necessary for the business to thrive. Collaborating across functional boundaries and within teams can yield various advantages for leaders. These benefits include heightened creativity, more productive teams, and a workforce that is more involved and empowered.

8. Influence

The capacity to persuade people to do tasks and alter their thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs is known as leadership influence. Leaders that are able to persuade others by using proper strategies with consideration can build trust and communicate information to their staff. It is a crucial quality of successful leaders. Manipulation is not the same as influence, which calls for authenticity and openness. High degrees of trust and emotional intelligence are necessary for it.

9. Integrity

Integrity is a crucial quality in a leader, both personally and professionally. It upholds a strict code of moral principles and ideals. Top-level executives should pay particular attention to it since they are the ones setting the direction of the company and making many other crucial decisions. Integrity in leadership is exhibited by a leader's ability to act and speak consistently, which gains the respect and trust of their team members.

10. Courage

A leader with courage is able to follow their instincts, take risky decisions, and come up with innovative ideas. Because of this, bravery is a crucial leadership quality for overcoming concerns, taking calculated chances, and building team trust. Leaders who foster a culture of high psychological safety at work empower their staff members to voice their opinions and address issues openly and honestly without worrying about the consequences. Leaders and team members alike can make decisive decisions that advance the cause when they possess courage.

11. Gratitude

Being grateful can result in improved sleep, a decrease in worry and sadness, and a rise in self-esteem. Gratitude sincere might even improve a leader. In the workplace, the most effective leaders never fail to express gratitude.

12. Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to respond to challenges in an adaptive manner in addition to being able to overcome hurdles and setbacks. Being resilient gives a leader the ability to overcome obstacles and guide their team toward achievement.

Challenges of Women Leadership in India

Lack of advancement opportunities

Female workers are getting less chance to move forward and play new role in company. It has been found that the female employees are 14% less likely to be promoted than their male colleagues. In addition, even though women received higher performance ratings, they tended to get low potential scores—a measure of how much their managers believed they would develop. Because potential is subjective, it opens the door to bias, and women suffer as a result

Lack of flexibility

A low staff retention rate and low productivity are caused by a lack of flexibility. The majority of women experience a lack of flexible choices at work, which influences them to quit or think about quitting. Businesses must provide a range of choices to keep women interested. A four-day workweek, flexible hours and time off, and remote/hybrid work are a few of the examples. In the end, though, companies must pay attention to the opinions of their female employees and decide which options will best support them.

Lack of work-life balance

Working women must effectively manage their personal and work lives. By establishing limits, assigning responsibilities, and emphasizing mental and emotional health. Managing job and family obligations simultaneously presents a lot of difficulties. An unbalanced professional life can cause despair and negatively impact one's mental health.

Lack of recognition

Employees that receive recognition are more motivated, feel like they accomplished something, and are valued for the work they do. Employees become demotivated and lose interest in their work when they receive no acknowledgment. Even after being overworked, women leaders still receive insufficient credit. For instance, compared to their male counterparts, female CEOs go above and above to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and employee well-being. However, the majority of businesses do not formally recognize their contributions. In the end, women find it more difficult to progress when they invest time and effort into unappreciated endeavors.

Lack of company commitment to DEI

People of various ages, colors, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities, genders, faiths, cultures, and sexual orientations are all included in DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). It includes people with a range of experiences, backgrounds, skill levels, and specialties. Serious problems like bullying, harassment, and discrimination are avoided thanks to EDI.

Women leaders have a strong desire to work with organizations that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. For female executives, these criteria have grown in importance over the past few years. The McKinsey survey found that women are over 1.5 times more likely than their male coworkers to have quit a job in order to work for an organization that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Lack of manager support

The absence of managerial support sometimes results in women leaders receiving less feedback and skill development. According to the survey, men are 19% more likely than women to undergo a formal assessment and 13% more likely to receive training in leadership abilities. Organizations should evaluate their leadership development procedures while keeping gender equity in mind in order to overcome this obstacle. Furthermore, there must be greater openness with regard to measurements so that women are aware of the precise criteria used to assess them. Lastly, firms should implement formal assessments, 360-degree feedback, and leadership training to support the success of women leaders.

Unequal pay

Women continue to be overrepresented in lower-paying jobs compared to their share of the workforce, notwithstanding an increase in senior roles. A Pew Research Center analysis from 2022 states that women will make about 82% of what males will make. The disparity in pay may also be attributed to gender discrimination, despite its difficulty in measuring. Transparency pay, as recommended by the National Bureau of Economic Research, can reduce the gender pay gap by as much as 30%. Furthermore, it is recommended that firms undertake periodic pay audits to ascertain whether women executives are receiving equitable compensation. In this manner, businesses might make up the difference by giving employees who make less than their peers a pay raise.

Unconscious bias

Women in positions of leadership are likewise impacted by unconscious discrimination. Inadequate decision-making can result in discrimination without meaning to. For example, unconscious bias may be at play if a hiring team decides not to consider a woman for an executive role because they feel it would be too demanding after childbirth. Fortunately, there are methods for bringing unconscious gender bias to light. Giving your staff training is one of the greatest ways to empower them to identify and address gender bias head-on. Another strategy is to identify the many biases that may exist. This tactic brings them to light so that everyone understands how biases can influence hiring and promotion decisions. Recognizing and discussing these biases can also aid in their transformation.

Lack of sponsorship

In large part, this is because women struggle to succeed since they are not given the appropriate sponsorship. A sponsor is a high-ranking advocate who believes in employees and is willing to advocate for them to advance to the next level of responsibility, promotion, or raise. On the other hand, a mentor simply provides expert advice. Unfortunately, women in leadership roles are often overshadowed and undersupported.

To buck this tendency, organizations are crucial in creating an environment that allows sponsorship to thrive. Inform them about sponsorship and increase awareness of the practice before striking up a conversation. Moreover, there are numerous benefits to linking sponsorship directly to succession planning or performance assessments in HRM systems.

Imposter syndrome

Many accomplished women doubt their own abilities and capabilities to the extent that they believe they are frauds. Instead of believing their position is a result of their skills and abilities, they think it is the result of misfortune or luck. Imposter syndrome is the term for the anxiety that makes female executives feel as though they don't belong in the C-suit.

Case Study: Ms Arundhati Bhattacharya was the first woman to be the chairperson of the national largest bank, SBI. Her remarkable journey started from probationary officer to one of the India's most influential business women. The journey of Ms Bhattacharya in SBI started in the year 1977 as a Probationary Officer at the age of 22. She born on 18th March 1956 in Kolkata, her father was an engineer at Bokaro steel Plant and her mother was a Homeopath consultant. Her husband Pritimoy Bhattacharya is an ex- professor of CSE Department, IIT Kharagpur. She completed her schooling from St. Xavier's school in Bokaro, and pursued her higher studies in English Literature at Lady Brobourn College in Calcutta and completed her Post Graduation from Jadavpur University.

Banking sector of the country is crowded with male. Despite of being male dominated industry she climbed her rank through hard work, dedication and exceptional skills. In 1980 she became the manager of SBI IIT Karagpur. In 2013, Ms Bhattacharya made history by becoming the first woman to lead SBI in its 206 years of history. She has been posted in all corner of the country north, south, east, and west. She also had a stint at SBI's New York office, overseeing branch performance and audit, her job was challenging. She mentioned that 'Retail is very difficult from corporate' she honed her skill in foreign exchange treasury, retail and corporate operation. She also has done Human Resource towards the fag and of her career and also had been an investment banker. The turning point came in her life when she got involved in establishing joint ventures for the bank, including the tie-up with Insurance Australia Group for general Insurance, Macquarie for private equity and society general for custodian services. She finds her one year assignment in SBI capital as MD and CEO very challenging and satisfying where she learnt to look at the bank from outside. That made a big difference in her career.

Arundhati Bhattacharya Leadership Impact on SBI: SBI saw tremendous changes during her four years as chairman, including the adoption of cutting-edge technology that enhanced client experiences and tackled the problem of bad loans. She oversaw the Bank during its most trying periods and saw through the integration of Bhartiya Mahila Bank with five associate banks.

The upshot of this merger was the establishment of a banking company with assets worth over Rs 37 lakh crore.

Along with technology, she highlighted the growth of digital platforms and products like SBI Buddy. As a result, during FY 17, mobile transactions totaling Rs 5.83 lakh crore were made. Under her direction, SBI established the SBI Incube as a wonderful initiative to support startups. The primary goal of ICUBE was for the bank to support, mentor, and advise business owners.

Initiatives for women: Ms Bhattacharya also played crucial role in fulfilling the expectation of women employees who contributed 20% of SBI work force. She already has taken lots of initiative for them including a two years sabbatical to pursue higher education, a transfer policy which allows them to be in close with their family and special training programs to enrich their professional lives. She also considered some kind of flexi timing and temporary deputation for women. Bhattacharya became a perfect role Model for young generation and her success story inspires many women to take up banking as a career.

Arundhati Bhattacharya Achievements: In 2018, she was honored with the ninth V.C Padmanabhan Memorial Award for excellence.

She also awarded the title of “Business Leader of the Year” at the Asian Awards.

In 2017, India Today magazine listed her 19th most powerful individual in India out of the 50 on their list.

In 2016, Forbes listed her as 25th most powerful women in the world.

At the 10th India Business Leader Awards in 2015, she was recognized as the outstanding Women Business Leader of the Year.

In 2014, Fortune magazine named her as the 24th most powerful woman in the Asia- Pacific region.

Conclusion

Ms Bhattacharya remarkable journey started from a Probationary Officer to become a first women chairman of SBI showcase the perfect role model. Her life history exhibits the result of her hard work, self confident, sacrifice and perseverance. Many doubted her capabilities to work in a corporation but she proved her potential, under her leadership the SBI grew its network to around 17000 branches and services over 330 million customers with a presence in 36 countries and recognized herself India’s most influential business women. She not only performed at nation level also served the bank internationally. During her service period she has been shifted to the corners of country many times and she was worried for her family at her tough time she followed the advice of her boss and mentor M.S Verma and she managed her personal and professional life well. She worked for women and taken many initiatives for them and inspired many women entrepreneurs to step up and join the start up ecosystem. Her 40 years of journey in SBI was full of challenges at the same exemplifies the power of determination, leadership and breaking gender barrier. She retired in 2017 and during her tenure the SBI rose 57%. Her story serves as an inspiration to women aspiring to succeed in male dominated fields and highlights the impact of ethical leadership and innovation in transforming large organization.

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