GENDER INEQUALITY IN CORPORATE INDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IT AND BANKING SECTORS

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ABSTRACT:

Gender inequality remains a critical issue in corporate India, particularly within the IT and banking sectors, which are vital to the nation's economic progress. This article investigates disparities in pay, leadership representation, work-life balance, and systemic barriers that hinder women's advancement. Drawing on recent studies, it reveals that the IT sector, despite its global outlook and flexible work arrangements, struggles with a glass ceiling, with women occupying approximately 30-35% of mid-level roles and less than 20% of executive positions. The banking sector, influenced by regulatory mandates, shows marginally better female participation at entry levels but faces challenges in promotions due to entrenched biases and hierarchical structures. Shared issues include societal stereotypes, limited mentorship opportunities, and inadequate support for maternity, intensified by post-pandemic shifts to hybrid work models that disproportionately affect women. For example, IT sees higher female attrition post-maternity, while banking's biased performance evaluations restrict upward mobility. The study also explores how technological advancements and foreign investments could mitigate these gaps, provided they are paired with deliberate interventions like diversity training and inclusive policies. Key findings suggest that closing the gender gap could enhance India's GDP by up to 27%, emphasizing the economic imperative for change. This article discusses systemic challenges and offers practical recommendations, advocating for collaborative efforts across corporations, government, and society to foster gender equity. Ultimately, achieving parity in these sectors is not only a moral necessity but also a strategic move for sustainable economic growth in India.

KEYWORDS:

GENDER INEQUALITY, CORPORATE INDIA, IT SECTOR, BANKING SECTOR, GLASS CEILING, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, LEADERSHIP REPRESENTATION.

PAPER ACCEPTED DATE:	PAPER PUBLISHED DATE:
25th December 2025	28th December 2025
PAPER DOI NO:	**PAPER DOI LINK:**
10.5281/zenodo.18077492	https://zenodo.org/records/18077492

INTRODUCTION:

In corporate India, where economic aspirations are sky-high, gender inequality remains a persistent barrier to realizing the nation's full potential. The IT and banking sectors, cornerstones of India's economic landscape, employ millions but reflect stark gender disparities that limit women's contributions. The IT industry, with its innovative culture and global exposure, might seem progressive, yet it often perpetuates subtle biases through unequal pay and restricted access to high-impact roles. Banking, shaped by regulatory frameworks and public sector policies, offers some structural advantages for women at entry levels but struggles with deeply rooted hierarchies that impede their rise to leadership. This comparative study examines these dynamics, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities for fostering gender equity in two of India's most influential sectors.

Gender inequality in these fields is not just a social issue—it's an economic one. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2023) ranks India 127th out of 146 countries, with economic participation being a significant weak point. In corporate India, women hold only 17% of board seats in Nifty 500 companies, with even lower representation in tech and finance (CFA Institute, 2023). In IT, women constitute about 34% of the workforce, but their attrition rates are 8-10% higher than men's, often due to family responsibilities and lack of flexible policies (Kant et al., 2022). Similarly, banking sees women in 25% of roles, but only 11% of CEO positions are female, reflecting systemic barriers (EdelGive Foundation, 2023). Studies by Kant et al. (2024b) highlight how technological interventions, like machine learning, could address workplace biases but require intentional implementation. Post-liberalization growth in the 1990s boosted both sectors, yet men dominated technical and leadership roles, a trend that persists despite policies like the Companies Act 2013 mandating female board representation (Kant et al., 2025). This article aims to unpack these issues, review existing literature, and propose actionable solutions to bridge the gender gap.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The literature on gender inequality in India's IT and banking sectors reveals a complex interplay of progress and persistent challenges, with several studies offering insights into structural and cultural barriers. Kant et al. (2025) explore how tourism's economic empowerment models could inform corporate strategies, noting that women in service-oriented roles, similar to banking, face limited upward mobility due to societal expectations. Their work suggests cross-sector learning to enhance gender equity. Similarly, Kant et al. (2024b) analyse the impact of counselling on performance, drawing parallels to how mentorship could boost women's career trajectories in IT and banking by addressing psychological and professional barriers. Kant et al. (2024c) examines sustainable techno-marketing strategies for MSMEs, highlighting how technology adoption can reduce gender disparities in competitive sectors like IT, provided inclusive policies are enforced.

Kant et al. (2022) investigate machine learning's role in enhancing workplace productivity, suggesting that AI-driven tools could mitigate biases in hiring and promotions in IT, though cultural resistance limits their impact. Kant (2019) discusses the rise of e-wallets, noting their potential to enhance financial inclusion for women in banking but pointing out persistent access gaps due to gender-specific barriers. Bezbarua (2012) highlights how India's service economy, including banking, creates opportunities for women but reinforces gendered labour divisions, with women often stuck in low-skill, customer-facing roles. The CFA Institute (2023) reports that women hold only 27% of roles in Indian public companies, with IT particularly lagging due to limited networking opportunities.

EdelGive Foundation (2023) underscores the scarcity of women in finance leadership, linking it to inadequate skill development and cultural biases, a trend evident in banking. The International Monetary Fund (2018) notes that limited access to finance hampers women's entrepreneurship, particularly in banking-reliant sectors. Nandini Kumar, et. al. (2025) points to India's improving Gender Inequality Index but persistent workplace gaps in IT and banking due to societal norms. The World Bank (2022) highlights banking's slight edge in female participation due to quotas, unlike IT's voluntary diversity efforts.

The Economics Journal (2022) finds that post-legislation board diversity in banks has increased, but women's decision-making power remains limited. Oxfam (2018) reports a 23% female workforce in banking, with high attrition due to work-life conflicts. Women's World Banking (2021) notes that while 77% of women have bank accounts via schemes like Jan Dhan, active usage is low due to gender barriers. CEPR (2024) emphasizes how proximity to bank branches aids women entrepreneurs but doesn't address corporate advancement gaps.

Surjit Singha, et. al. (2022) links leadership disparities in banking to social exclusion. UiTM (2024) highlights women's struggles in high-risk banking roles, mirroring IT's competitive environments. Rath S., et. al. (2022) details glass ceiling effects, with men dominating senior banking roles. EconStor (2024) suggests foreign investment could reduce gender gaps through technology transfer, but policy support is crucial. GAP Bodhitaru (2023) identifies work-life balance as a persistent issue for women in banking, while McKinsey (2015) estimates significant GDP gains from gender parity in both sectors. SumeeDastidaret. al. (2020) attribute banking's glass ceiling to historical biases, and Paduri H. (2025) highlights income disparities in corporate India. UWTSD (2022) documents workplace discrimination in banking, and the IMF (2016) links gender inequality to high informal employment in both sectors. Collectively, these studies call for systemic reforms to address entrenched gender disparities.

DISCUSSION:

Comparing gender inequality in India's IT and banking sectors reveals both shared challenges and distinct nuances. In IT, the sector's innovative culture should foster inclusivity, yet women face barriers in technical roles and leadership due to stereotypes questioning their expertise. Kant et al. (2022) suggest that machine learning tools could reduce biases in IT hiring, but implementation lags due to cultural resistance. Banking, with regulatory mandates like quotas, shows slightly better female representation at entry levels, but promotions are hindered by biased performance evaluations, as noted by EdelGive Foundation (2023). Pay gaps persist in both, averaging 20-30%, with IT's merit-based systems sometimes masking subjective biases and banking's structured appraisals favouring men.

The post-COVID shift to hybrid work has exacerbated inequalities. In IT, women report higher burnout from juggling remote work and domestic responsibilities, contributing to elevated attrition rates (Kant et al., 2024b). Banking's branch-based roles limit flexibility, intensifying the motherhood penalty (Oxfam, 2018). Cultural norms, such as patriarchal expectations, underpin these issues, but IT's global exposure introduces some progressive practices, like diversity initiatives from multinational firms, unlike banking's more localized operations.

Intersectionality adds complexity—women from marginalized groups face compounded barriers in both sectors, with IT's urban-rural education gaps and banking's formal requirements excluding many (Kant et al., 2025). Economically, untapped female talent stifles innovation in IT and stability in banking. Policies like gender audits, as suggested by Kant et al. (2024c), could drive change, but enforcement is critical. Cross-sector learning—IT's flexibility inspiring banking, and banking's regulatory rigor guiding IT—offers a path forward to dismantle these barriers effectively.

CONCLUSION:

This comparative study of gender inequality in India's IT and banking sectors underscores a mix of progress and persistent challenges. IT, despite its progressive image, struggles with retention and promotion, with women exiting mid-career due to work-life conflicts and limited access to leadership (Kant et al., 2022). Banking, supported by regulatory quotas, shows better entry-level representation but faces hurdles in elevating women to senior roles due to entrenched hierarchies (EdelGive Foundation, 2023). Shared issues—cultural biases, inadequate maternity support, and systemic undervaluation—highlight the need for holistic reforms.

The differences between sectors offer learning opportunities: IT's flexible work models could inspire banking, while banking's regulatory frameworks might guide IT toward structured inclusivity. Economically, closing these gaps is critical, with estimates suggesting a potential 27% GDP boost through gender parity (McKinsey, 2015). Kant et al. (2025) emphasize cross-sector strategies, such as leveraging technology for equitable practices, which could transform both industries.

Ultimately, gender equity in corporate India is about creating environments where women can thrive without compromise. As India aims for global economic leadership, ignoring this issue would be a missed opportunity. Future research should monitor policy impacts, but the call to action is clear: corporations, governments, and society must collaborate to build a truly inclusive corporate landscape.

SUGGESTIONS

To address gender inequality in India's IT and banking sectors, a comprehensive approach is necessary, combining policy, corporate initiatives, and societal shifts. First, implement mandatory annual gender audits to assess pay equity, promotion rates, and leadership diversity. In IT, AI-driven tools, as suggested by Kant et al. (2022), could detect biases in hiring algorithms, while banking could apply similar tools to loan approvals that often disadvantage women.

Second, establish robust mentorship and sponsorship programs for women. Pairing female employees with senior leaders can enhance visibility and career progression, particularly in male-dominated networks. IT firms like TCS could expand women's networks, and banks like HDFC could mandate mentorship quotas (Kant et al., 2024b).

Third, prioritize work-life balance through flexible policies. Extend maternity leave to 26 weeks across both sectors, introduce paternity leave to share responsibilities, and provide creche facilities or subsidies. IT could adopt 'no-meeting' zones for parents in hybrid models, while banking could pilot flexible shifts (GAP Bodhitaru, 2023).

Fourth, invest in unconscious bias training for all employees, especially managers, to reshape workplace cultures. Collaborate with NGOs for sector-specific programs, such as STEM initiatives for girls to strengthen IT pipelines (Kant et al., 2025).

Fifth, strengthen government policies—enforce stricter compliance with the Companies Act for board diversity, offer tax incentives for gender-balanced firms, and integrate gender equity in business curricula.

Sixth, leverage technology for inclusion. In banking, fintech apps tailored for women could boost financial literacy (Kant, 2019); in IT, anonymous feedback platforms could address discrimination.

Finally, track progress with metrics like the Gender Pay Gap Index and foster cross-sector alliances to share best practices. These steps, if implemented with commitment, could position corporate India as a global leader in gender equity, driving both social and economic benefits.

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