

# U.P.S.C.

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FORUM IAS

Glass Ceiling isn't invisible, It is just too high for many to see

Kita is a post-graduate in management from a premier institution. Being at the top of her class, she secured her dream role at a consultancy firm. Due to her skills and proficiency, she soon made her way to the middle-management level. Despite getting married recently, Kita never compromised on the time dedicated for her professional commitments. However, to her disappointment she found out that she is being overlooked for promotions to the top-level role. A man junior to her in experience is being considered instead! This incident shattered Kita's confidence. However, when she confided in her mother, she was told to be grateful for the opportunity to continue being a

working woman post-marriage!  
Overall in a country where female labour force participation rate is below global average, just being a part of workforce should be considered an achievement right?

Greek philosopher Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things," each person's own experience and expectation determine their judgement. For Kita's mother, the fact that her daughter gets to work is in itself a big deal as she never got the same opportunity. Kita shattering the glass ceiling and making it to the top-level management is not as important to her.

The story of Kita and her mother highlights how evident glass ceiling's presence is, and how its presence is dismissed due to personal circumstances!

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# U.P.S.C.

प्रश्न संख्या

(Question No. 62567\_810401\_191000735(2015-0-20170154))

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Glass Ceiling can be understood as an unacknowledged barrier that prevents women and other marginalized sections from rising beyond a certain acceptable limit in professional spheres. Now that we have established its meaning, let us try to breakdown how it came into existence.

Machiavelli said, "Power is the Pinot on which everything hinges." As per him, the primary goal for men is to control and maintain power. Glass ceiling's existence therefore can be understood as the way for ~~to~~ chosen elites to secure their seat at the high table keeping everyone else out!

Similarly, Thomas Hobbes highlighted that man is inherently greedy. Diffusion of authority would prevent

Too much power going into a single hand and good certainly would not allow that! Therefore glass ceiling is constructed to prevent this dilution!

Further, glass ceiling can be understood as manifestation of social divides in professional spheres. For instance; at the top positions in any public or private organization, there is an over-representation of people from higher castes and under-representation of people from lower castes. This mirrors the social hierarchy espoused by the caste system.

The existence and perpetuation of glass ceiling is a result of multiple factors. This can be understood through the leaky pipeline problem, which highlights how there is a significant reduction in the number of women.

in a field as they advance in their careers due to workplace inequality, implicit bias, lack of guidance — all things that add up to the 'glass ceiling'.

Now that we have understood how glass ceiling has come into being, let us try to understand how it is not invisible.

Catherine Mackinnon said, 'When I look at the state, it appears male to me.' In the 18th Lok Sabha, women MPs constitute 13.6% of the total membership which serves as a very visible reminder of the 'male' picture of the state.

Not just in the political domain, existence of glass ceiling is very evident in Economic sphere as well. As per Forbes list, only 10% of fortune 500 companies are led by women.

Recently, Supreme Court of India unveiled a redesigned 'Lady Justice' statue. Though justice is personified as a woman, it is ironical that only 2 out of 33 judges in the Supreme Court are women!

In a similar way, though there has been focus on celebrating 'Wari Shakti', women representation in State Police forces and Military continue to be underwhelming.

Technological field that is considered as the driver of the future continues to be led by men. Despite 43% of STEM graduates being women, their representation in workforce remains low at 14%. Rigid glass ceiling acts as a disincentive and keeps women away from Male-dominated fields!

Existence of 'Pink-collar' jobs too serve as a visible reminder of glass ceiling as these roles are mainly concentrated in low and middle level tier.

Not just for women, Glass ceiling is visible for other marginalized sections as well. For instance, it took 75 years for India to elect a tribal President. No transgender person has made it to Lok Sabha yet. Sachar Committee report highlighted underrepresentation of minorities in Bureaucracy.

Therefore the absence of marginalized communities from the realms of power serves as a stark reminder of the existence of glass ceiling.

Now that we have seen how visible glass ceiling is, let us try to dissect why it is so high for many to consider.

'Accept the things you cannot change' is a common life lesson that teaches people to find contentment and joy in any given circumstance. However, this attitude at times leads to acceptance of historical subjugation and denial of its resulting outcomes.

Since ancient times, multiple factors like lack of noble birth, accepted gender roles, social hierarchies sanctioned by religious scriptures were used to deny authority to marginalized sections. Over time they were accepted as the norm and simply overlooked!

As per Maslow's need hierarchy theory, physiological and safety needs are fulfilled first. For marginalized sections survival is the most pertinent challenge. Therefore glass ceiling is not

factored in for decision making as self-esteem and actualization needs are too high up the pyramid for them.

Further, Myopic vision due to being caught up in daily struggles can be taken as a factor for marginalized sections failing to look high up to spot the glass ceiling.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". Therefore action must be taken to convert the unjust glass ceiling to a glass staircase providing equal access to the 'top-floor' for all.

For this, at individual level, role of family becomes important for value inculcation. Empathetic

Individuals rising to the top would ensure equal opportunities for others to rise as well. Educational institutes too can play a role by putting equal focus on Moral and Intellectual competence development.

At the level of society, social norms need to evolve to prevent prejudice against marginalized sections. This would allow people from all stratas and segments to rise to their full potential.

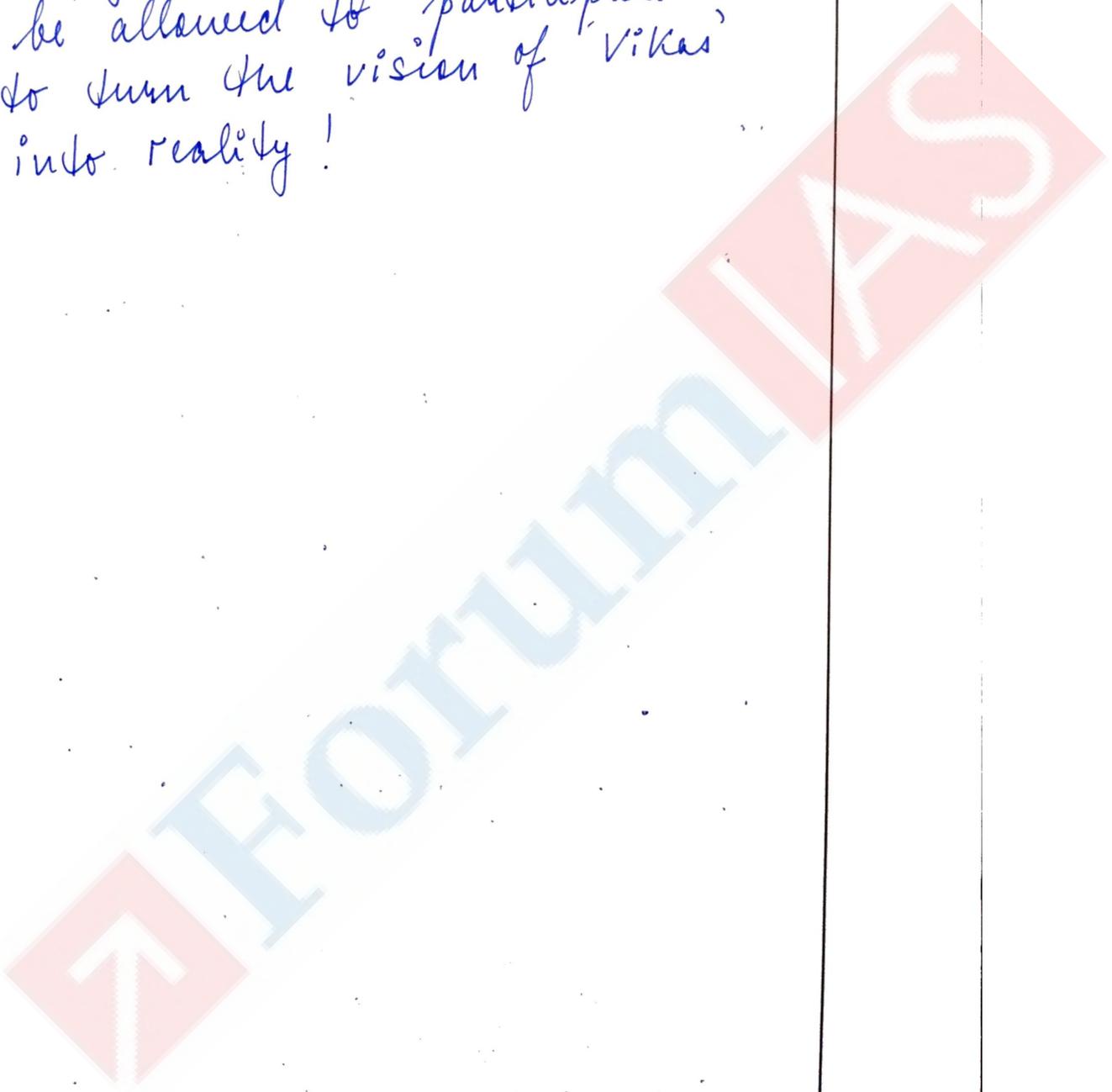
Government through its policies and schemes can create equitable environment for all to flourish. For instance, tax breaks can be provided to organizations with balanced representation at the top-level management.

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No bird can fly with one of its wings clipped. Therefore every section of society must be allowed to participate to turn the vision of 'Vikas' into reality!



②  
The age of smart devices and the decline of wise choices

Mira is an academically bright Senior secondary student. On securing more than 90% in her 10<sup>th</sup> Board exams, she received a brand new laptop as a reward for her hardwork.

The laptop was meant to aid Mira in her academic pursuits by providing her access to additional resources and lectures. Digital Education has really taken off after all!

The wise choice here was to use it as a tool for higher achievements.

However, soon the allure of the smart device dimmed Mira's intellect leading her to bad choices.

Instead of watching lectures, she started watching the latest episodes of her favourite shows.

Instead of keeping up with her homework, she used it to

3

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keep track of her friends' latest outing! This ultimately led to her failure in her final exams.

The story of Mira portrays how in the era dominated by smart devices, poor, un-wise choices have become common!

In this essay, we will first understand what is 'smart' about these devices, how they are leading to poor choices and later we will provide a prescription to prevent such choices.

Story of human civilization is a story of evolution. From Agricultural Revolution of the Neolithic times to the ongoing Digital Revolution since the 20th century, man has used his intellectual prowess to make his life easier and better.

Devices too have witnessed quite the evolution. From Telegraph to Telephones to now smart phones, from computer that occupied an entire room to ipads that can fit in anyone's palms, devices have smartly evolved to become ingrained in our day to day lives.

Before we establish the negative effects of these devices on our choices, let us first understand what is so 'smart' about these devices.

It is quite common these days to catch a glimpse of someone hooked to their mobile phone or laptops. One of the reasons for this is the multiple-use cases that these devices provide from simple functions like calling and texting, to more advanced uses like coding or scientific calculations, these devices provide them all.

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These devices provide ease of living for us mortal beings. For instance, Smart watches allow us to keep track of our health. Smart appliances through their energy efficient performance minimize our electricity bills.

Further, they serve as a medium to access the internet, listen to our choice of music anytime and anywhere, zomb out into our favourite shows when life gets too overwhelming. We are often reminded of the fact that 'life is too short', it is these devices that allow us to capture ~~the~~ life as it passes us by in images and store the precious memories!

The era of automation is upon us. In this context, smart vehicles ease our decision making on the road through their in-built navigation systems.

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Now that we have understood the context in which these devices are considered smart, let us understand how they are leading to decline in wise choices.

Plato described Wisdom as one of the four cardinal virtues for a good life. Wisdom is considered important to live a life of purpose. However, overuse of smart-devices is creating the condition of 'digital dementia' which results in cognitive decline and inability to choose wisely.

Oxford named 'Brain Rot' as the word of the year in 2024. Mindless and Endless consumption of low quality content online suppresses the intellectual development especially of the youth. Penetration of smart devices has increased this condition due to ubiquitous access to the internet facilitated by them.

Wisdom allows a person to think from a long-term perspective. However,  dopamine chasing behaviour promoted through algorithms prevent accounting for  long-term outcomes in decision making.

'No Man is an Island', Human beings thrive in communities by learning from each other. However, nowadays,  services have replaced  personal connections  precluding the passing of wisdom from one person to another.

Ancient wisdom dictates that  Nature is a mirror to one's soul. Connecting with Nature helps one in advancing closer to  wiser decision making.

However,  smart devices seem to have taken  mankind hostage. It is more common to find

people's faces plastered to a screen rather than sitting and soaking nature's wisdom in a park.

A healthy mind resides in a healthy body. The sedentary lifestyle promoted by the digital age has severe negative consequences for the physical and mental health of individuals. Increased cortisol levels and consequent life-style diseases prevent wise choices by distracting individuals from focusing on what truly matters.

Spiritual Capital too is on the decline due to these devices. Socrates said, 'Knowing myself is the beginning of all wisdom.'

However smart devices by being ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> window to the world prevent us from looking inside and understanding ourselves better. This lack of understanding leads to poor choices.

Having explored the inter-linkages between smart devices and un-wise choices, let us briefly explore the impact of this.

India As per NFHS-5 over half of India's population is under 30 years of age. India thus has the potential to reap this demographic dividend to catapult itself to Top Three of the world's economies. However, overuse and misuse of digital devices by youth can thwart this rise by preventing our human resource to be converted to effective human capital!

Addiction to Smart-devices is leading to virtualization of Inter-personal relationships which are the foundation of

a stable society. Breakdown of Inter-personal relationships can lead to breakdown of society and in-turn the nation!

Economic Survey 2019-20 highlighted the concept of 'Trust as a public good'. Smart devices through their applications like Social Media often sow the seeds of mistrust in the minds of people by amplifying the wrong voices! Communal and Political riots are a testament to this. Such chaos can often sign death note for a country.

At the level of Individuals too, smart devices and poor choices can lead to harm. For instance Debt-led consumerism is on the rise due to social comparison and ease of access to credit provided by these smart devices. This often leads to bankruptcy.

and suffering for an individual. However, we must remember that technology in itself is value neutral. Its outcome depends on how we choose to use it. Therefore, let us understand how we can preserve our choices in the current digital age.

Firstly, as Carl Jung said, "We can't change anything unless we accept it", therefore we must admit that overreliance on smart devices is harmful. Then we can deploy strategies for self-restraint like digital detox on weekends, fixing time-slots for device-use.

Secondly, Elsters need to be role-models and set the right examples for the children. John Locke said, "Mind is a tabula rasa at birth". Therefore setting

Right standards for children can prevent addiction to smart devices as they grow older.

Further, smart device manufacturers too can take initiative to prevent cognitive decline by designing devices in a way that reduces overuse. Minimalist Phone is a step in the right direction.

Government too needs to work towards promoting digital literacy → organizing workshops to promote right use of smart devices.

At last, individuals need to pledge to abide by Aristotle's Golden Mean to ensure no other person is outsmarted by a device like Mira was.