

# EDI NEWSLETTER

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the 2023 EDI newsletter! We will be looking at many different topics in which we can each gain a deeper understanding of the workings of our changing world.

We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter!

The EDI Newsletter Team



# Diwali **More Than Just Fireworks**

People usually associate Diwali with fireworks, food, and a Hindu mythological story about the God Ram, but we tend to overlook the celebrations of other religions during this festival. In order to better understand different cultures and think “wider” in general, it’s really important to have insight into as many perspectives as possible. While the Hindu interpretation of Diwali focuses on Vedic history, religions like Sikhism and Jainism celebrate events from more recent history, so we have a lot more context behind them, and it is easier to understand the reasons behind rituals and the festival itself.

## **“Diwali highlight the resilience of humanity and serve as reminders of the universal values of courage, knowledge and compassion”**



The Sikh Perspective: Sikhism actually celebrates “Bandi Chhor Divas” meaning “Day of Liberation” but the festival coincides with Diwali, and therefore they are usually celebrated as one festival, although the context of the celebration is completely different. The story behind “Bandi Chhor Divas” originated in 1619, around 7000 years after the events of the Ramayana (a mythological epic which details the God Ram’s life), when the Mughal emperor Jahangir imprisoned the 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, along with 52 princes in a fort as he saw them as a political threat. During his imprisonment, Jahangir grew close to the Guru, as the Guru’s prayers were believed to have cured his illness, and therefore he agreed to release Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru only agreed to leave if he could take the princes with him, so Jahangir said that he could take along any princes who could hold onto his cloak as he walked out of the prison, thinking that this would limit the number of prisoners that were released. However, the Guru outwitted Jahangir by stitching 52 tassels onto his cloak so that all the prisoners could be liberated. Although, like the story of Ram’s victory over Ravana, Bandi Chhor Divas celebrates the triumph of good over evil, it also spreads a message of religious tolerance, since Guru Gobind Singh prioritised the freedom of the 52 princes over his own, regardless of what religion they were from. This reinforces the principle that all people are equal and worthy of respect, a message that resonates strongly with the core ethos of every organisation promoting diversity of any kind. It is also extremely relevant at the moment, with crises happening all over the world due to religious differences, noticeably in the Sikh diaspora with protests globally after the death of a Sikh activist in Canada.



The Jain Perspective: Jains commemorate Diwali as the day that the 24th Tirthankara (spiritual teacher in the Jain faith) Lord Mahavir attained Nirvana, meaning that he was free from the restrictions of materialistic life and his physical body after 12 years of meditation; this is incredibly important for Jains as they believe in being reverent towards spiritual leaders who attempt to convey the importance of enlightenment to others, and therefore the enlightenment of Lord Mahavir is a central teaching of the religion. This attainment of Nirvana is symbolic of the power of knowledge over ignorance. During this period, Jains meditate deeply, aiming to gain a better understanding of the focal principles of the religion, like Aparigraha (non-attachment), and it is considered a time for introspection. The celebrations of Diwali in Jainism very much differ from those in Sikhism and Hinduism in order to adhere to principles of Jainism, particularly Ahimsa (non-violence). While Jains still light candles to symbolise the power of knowledge over ignorance and reiterate the importance of enlightenment, they don’t light fireworks as they release toxic chemicals that can be harmful and dangerous to both the environment and people.



Ultimately, despite their differences, all of these interpretations of Diwali highlight the resilience of humanity and serve as reminders of the universal values of courage, knowledge and compassion, which transcend cultural differences and foster a sense of unity, empathy and respect in every situation

**By Freya Bhavani**

# Glass in the Workplace

By Taniya Soni

There is an unseeable force stopping minorities from reaching the heights that they otherwise would in many male-dominated professions, and although it's not quite unseeable as the name 'glass ceiling' may portray it as. It is not much of a mystic 'force' as a systemic, acknowledged harbouring of (more often than not) conscious prejudice against POC, women and the LGBTQ+ community in many careers. Considering this, it may be easy to assume that it is the same for men entering female-dominated professions: after all, they are the minority there, right? Whilst it is true that they are not the majority, they are not treated as one would assume the minority would be. Extensive research in several studies shows that promotions, applause and credit are more frequently handed out to heterosexual white men in fields which would not 'traditionally' be recognised as one welcoming to them. This concept is known as the 'glass escalator' and this, alongside similar conceptualisations, shall be explored in this essay.

The 'glass escalator' is not as widely known and accepted a phenomenon as its counterpart, the 'glass ceiling'. However, a common mistake to make is that both are hindering the minority in their respective scenes- a clarification: One prevents women, people of colour, and members of the LGBTQ+ community from achieving the commendation and respect they deserve, and the other does the same. However, in the scenarios, the narrative is a little bit different. The story of the 'glass escalator' is one of a female-dominated field where white men are found to rise the ranks faster than the women (and POC and LGBTQ+ members) that have more experience in that line of work. This concept was first explored in a study titled "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the 'Female' Professions" by Christine Williams in 1992. It probes the idea that male professionals in female-dominated fields face fewer barriers and are provided more help when climbing the career ladder, opposite to the effect of the 'glass ceiling'.

A study titled "Men in Female-Dominated Careers: A Case Study in Nursing" by T.L. Nolan Jr. (2006) examines the inner workings of men in nursing and investigates how they navigate their roles and career progression. Through interviews and observations, the author recognises the disadvantages that men may encounter in nursing and sheds light on several advantages. The examination states that "male nurses often encounter the 'glass escalator,' where they are rapidly promoted into administrative or leadership positions." Societal expectations and gender norms dictate that even in female-dominated professions, men possess a certain aptitude for leadership roles and are thus perceived as better suited to positions of authority, often despite the capabilities of a female counterpart. Additionally, disregarding the fact that in most cases, minorities in male-dominated careers are dealt the worse hand, men in 'feminine' careers may benefit from more mentorship and guidance due to them being in the minority. This leads to men having a more secure and wide support network along with mentorship opportunities early in their schooling. In a nutshell, the provision of better opportunities to men in female-dominated fields does not occur only in the selection process of managers, but from the beginning of their education, all the way through to compensation and better pay.

The topic of race has not yet been addressed and this is something that one may tend to neglect when talking about advantages in the workplace. The idea of the 'glass step stool' is one frequently rejected by various communities for the suggestion that white women may have it easier than POC women, even in female-dominated fields. There is a taboo around the unrecognised advantage of race in careers, especially amongst women. The 'glass step stool' provides the theory that there is a (although gender-promoted) convenience in, as a woman, being white - or white passing - in the workplace, even in male-dominated fields. It explores the idea that the stereotypical feminine role of having good communication skills is only perceived to be in white women and does not apply to women of colour in the workplace, due to the racially motivated idea of women of colour being more aggressive. An example: whilst white women may be considered as friendly and helpful for urging a customer to buy an expensive item, a woman of colour may be perceived as pushy and stubborn whilst attempting the same thing. This is not to be recognised as a proclamation of a rift between women, simply an observation of the fact that there are more factors affecting oppression than just gender in the workplace.

**“Returning to the gender side of the disadvantage, there is a preconceived notion that once the ‘glass ceiling’ is shattered and cleared, women can progress on with their careers without any more obstructions, the reality is far different.”**

There is, unfortunately, more glass to be hindered by, even higher up in the ranks. The idea of 'glass walls' is exactly what it may appear to be, in relation to the 'glass ceiling'. It is systemic and consistent in its temperance to a woman's career and there are several examples of it, most notably in STEM fields. While men may experience their share of hardships, women encounter considerably more due to 'glass walls'; lesser known to men, but widely acknowledged by women, there is the issue of operating in a field that conventionally caters itself to 'traditional' male values. This alignment with societal expectations, as mentioned earlier, provides men (in male-dominated fields) with more respect and facilitates their movements between departments and ranks. Moreover, there is a historical precedence of domination by men in STEM fields, and this has left a mark on the selection and hiring process to date through encouraging the perception of men as more suitable for various roles in such careers. These may seem obvious facts to point out, but the basis remains: these are not acknowledged or understood by male-counterparts and colleagues in male-dominated fields, thus facilitating the presence and effectiveness of the 'glass walls'.

This essay is meant to stand as an introduction into the world of Glass in the Workplace (hopefully one that spurs the reader to research more into the topic), for a philosophy of mine is that it does not do to not be aware of invisible barriers and advantages that others or oneself may eventually encounter farther down the road. It is essential to understand the concepts of bias in selection processes: to writing down a male-sounding nickname to get called in for an interview all the way through to Viola having to wear a wig in "She's the Man", there are prejudices we cater to all around us, some more prevalent than others. Acknowledging them will undoubtedly aid you in understanding them, and, hopefully, overcoming them. Remember to remember your privilege and don't forget the presence of the lack of it.



## What are the impacts of natural disaster for women in low income countries?

Natural disasters can have a terrible impact on people's lives and wipe out many. But did you know that women have a higher death rate than men, especially in low-income countries? For example, in the 2007 Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, the mortality rate was over double the amount for women as compared to men.

There are several other reasons for more women dying or suffering than men in these events, but this can often be linked to cultural restrictions and gender inequality in parts of the world where there are countries with newly emerging economies. One reason is a lack of menstrual hygiene products. For example, during and after the 1998 floods in Bangladesh, many women suffered from urinary tract infections due to the lack of sanitation and the taboo attached to menstruation. The UN has carried out research into the impact of climate change on women, and is also working on the impact of natural disasters on the prevalence of gender-based violence.

Moreover, due to family obligations such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, women's daily lives can often be more home-based, especially in developing countries. In the 2001 Gujarat and the 1993 Maharashtra earthquakes, which killed 20,000 and 10,000 people respectively, more women died because more women were indoors. In some particularly disadvantaged areas of the world, women sacrifice their own wellbeing to support their families, for example feeding their children before themselves. This leaves them often malnourished by their meagre nutrition and, therefore, not in the physical shape to run from or survive a natural disaster. In certain communities, women may be uncomfortable to leave the house without the accompaniment of a male relative. Consequently, when it comes to natural disasters like earthquakes, women are at greater risk because they are in houses, rather than being out in an open field, for example. Is it really fair that they value their honour more than their own lives?

In some communities, due to culture-based gender norms, not only are women unable to take employment outside of the house, but young girls are also denied any form of education. This put aside, these women aren't even taught any basic survival skills, such as swimming or climbing trees! In 2004, when the third-largest earthquake in recorded history triggered a tsunami in the Indian Ocean, up to four women died for every man in hard-hit Aceh, Indonesia. One large factor: women in Indonesia do not usually learn how to swim or climb trees. Well, then what can we do to support women and girls? There are several steps we could take to decrease their mortality rate in natural disasters and give them a fairer chance at life.



Here are a few:

- Provide menstrual hygiene products and better healthcare for women.
- Provide funding for programmes specifically for women and girls.
- Gather separate data for men and women to quickly locate and tackle gender-based inequalities.
- Work towards gender equality within society.
- Provide housing quickly after an earthquake to give women and girls stability and security.
- Education within communities to change cultural norms, e.g., swimming lessons for girls
- Provide security and safety in evacuation zones, e.g., by training police officers to look out for gender-specific violence.

If you want to help, you could donate to these organisations:

- To help end period poverty: <https://www.freedom4girls.co.uk/#:~:text=To%20combat%20period%20poverty%2C%20Freedom4Girls,put%20an%20end%20to%20period>
- To help the recovery of people suffering from humanitarian crises: <https://www.gov.uk/donate-volunteer-humanitarian-disaster>

**“Secondary impacts that women and girls suffer following a disaster may be the real disaster for women and girls.”**

Together, we can improve the lives of countless women, so let's take action now

**By Aamenah Jaffery**

# Diversity in Politics

By Zehra Pervez

Diversity in politics is pivotal for fostering a representative and inclusive democracy. In England, the political geography has witnessed a significant change in recent times, with the rise of ethnic minority politicians who contribute to the diverse perspectives in policy making. However, there are many challenges faced by ethnic minority politicians.

Diversity in politics ensures a more accurate reflection of the population's varied perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. When politicians come from different ethnic backgrounds, they bring unique perceptivity to policymaking, eventually leading to further inclusive and effective governance. By embracing diversity, political institutions can better address the requirements and enterprises of all citizens, fostering a sense of representation and belonging.

## Challenges Faced by Ethnic Minority Politicians:

Despite the progress made, ethnic minority politicians in England frequently encounter challenges such as stereotyping and a lack of representation within political parties.

**“The underrepresentation of women in political leadership remains a significant issue.”**

## Examples of Ethnic Minority Politicians in England:

### *Diane Abbott:*

Diane Abbott, a British Labour Party politician, made history in 1987 as the first black woman tagged to the House of Commons. Serving as the Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, Abbott has been a prominent advocate for social justice and equivalency throughout her career.

### *Sajid Javid:*

Sajid Javid, a member of the Conservative Party, has held many clerical positions, including Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Original Government. In 2016, he became the first person of Asian descent to hold one of the Great Services of State when appointed as the Secretary of State for Communities and Original Government.

### *Rushanara Ali:*

Rushanara Ali, a member of the Labour Party, has been the Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow since 2010. As an advocate for social justice, Ali has been laboriously involved in addressing issues related to education, housing, and community development.

The addition of politicians from a more diverse background to England's political framework is a testament to the country's commitment to diversity and representation. However, challenges persist, and ongoing changes are necessary to address systemic walls and promote equal openings for all individuals. As we celebrate the representation of more ethnically diverse politicians, it's essential to continue promoting the significance of fostering an inclusive political terrain that truly represents the different voices of the entire population



Diane Abbott



Sajid Javid



Rushanara Ali