

Impact of Education and Work Participation on Improvement of Women's Status

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INTRODUCTION

These days, women at the workplace are intelligent, smart, and ambitious. The educated women do not want to limit their lives in the four walls of the house. They demand equal respect from their partners. A McKinsey survey report states that 79 percent of entry-level women and 83 percent of middle-management women desire to move to the next level at work. Additionally, 75 percent of women aspire to progress to top management roles, including C-suite – this number puts their ambition on par with their male counterpart.

However, women still face barriers in their climb to the top. Many of these barriers result from a “second-generation gender bias”, i.e., unintentional actions and environments that appear neutral but reflect masculine values, and the life situations of men who have been dominant in the development of traditional work settings.

In India, women have to go a long way to achieve equal rights and position because traditions are deep rooted in Indian society where the sociological set up has been a male dominated one. Women are considered as weaker sex and always been made to depend on men folk in their family and outside, throughout their life. The Indian culture made them only subordinates and executors of the decisions made by other male members, in the basic family structure. While atleast half the brainpower on earth belongs to women, women remain perhaps the world's most underutilized resource.

Despite all the social hurdles, India is brimming with the success stories of women. They stand tall from the rest of the crowd and are applauded for their achievements in their respective field. The transformation of the social fabric of the Indian society, in terms of increased educational status of women and varied aspirations for better living, necessitated a change in the life style of Indian women. They are assertive, persuasive and willing to take risks. They managed to survive and succeed in this cut throat competition with their hard work, diligence and perseverance. The ability to learn quickly, problem solving skills, willingness to take risks, motivate people, the strategies to win and also to accept the loss gracefully are identified as the strengths of the successful women.

This study focuses on those women who have been successful in terms of number of promotions from the entry level to other level/s in public sectors like Bank, Educational, Engineering, Medical and Police. The research traces the challenges of these successful women in one of the southern districts of Tamil Nadu mainly Sivagangai. The study ponders over on glass ceiling effect or gender diversity issue along with cultural biases, gender stereotypes. It also recommends all the organizations (public and private) to encourage and promote eligible women to managerial/administrative positions.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate the whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”. PT. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. If it is said that education is the key to all problems, then it won't be improper. Thinkers have given a number of definitions of education but out of these definitions, the most important definition is that which was put forth by M. Phule. According to M. Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil". If we consider the above definition, we come to know that whatever revolutions that have taken place in our history, education is at the base of them. Education means modification of behavior in every aspect, such as mentality, outlook, attitude etc. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

Women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state, or country. It is a woman who plays a dominant role in the basic life of a child. Women are an important section of our society. Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is, therefore, crucial for the socio, economic and political progress of India. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for prompting ways and means to empower women. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Hence, one cannot neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment.

The development in women education in India is striving towards superpower of the world in recent years. The increasing change in women education, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women for becoming superpower. As per United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a gender just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi level construct referring to individuals, organizations, and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people have an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over these resources. A

study on the literacy rate of women in India reveals that at no time the literacy rate of women matched with the men

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Women's participation may be used both for support by an agency and as a control device by the lawmakers. Participation may be direct or indirect, formal or informal; it may be political, social or administrative in nature. It is a sad situation that about half of India's population has only 10 percent representation in the Lok Sabha. In the current Rajya Sabha, there are 21 women out of a total of 233 MPs, which amounts only nine percent, which is even lower than that of Lok Sabha. At the societal level male dominance in Parliament, Bureaucracy, Judiciary, Army, Police all point towards gender inequality, notwithstanding the fact that it is often argued that women's political leadership would bring about a more cooperative and less conflict-prone world. Lack of political and economic powers added to the subservient and unequal position of women. After Independence, in spite of having our own constitution, India was not able to achieve morals like fairness, equality and social justice.

THE PROCESS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A career is the sequence and variety of occupations (paid and unpaid) which one undertakes throughout a lifetime. More broadly, career includes life roles, leisure activities, learning, and work. Career development is the process of managing life, learning, and work over the lifespan (Patton & McMahon, 2001). Theorists such as Super (1957) and Schein (1971) assume that a career is a life-long, uninterrupted experience of work, which can be divided into neat stages of development, starting with initial ideas about working and ending with retirement. However, the patterns of women's career development are frequently affected by family as well as workplace commitments and responsibilities, unlike those of men. Therefore Astin (1984) proposed that career development theory should describe women's career separately from men's careers.

Her model of career development is based upon four constructs which she believes shape women's career development. They are work motivation, work expectations, sex-role socialization and structure of opportunity which includes factors such as sex-role stereotyping, distribution of jobs and discrimination. Larwood and Gutek (1987) concluded that any theory of women's career development must take into account of five factors.

1. Career preparation, or how women are brought up to view the idea of a career.
2. Availability of opportunities should be taken into consideration, and whether they are limited for women, compared with men.
3. Marriage, viewed as neutral for men but harmful to the career of women.
4. Similarly, pregnancy and having children inevitably the cause for women to take some kind of career break.
5. Timing and age, as career breaks and family relocations often mean that women's careers do not follow the same chronological patterns as those of men.

While majority of the women still face discrimination and gender bias, in the last few decades, the number of women successful in politics, technology and business etc. is definitely on the rise. Society has started seeing women in a different perspective. They work as lawyers, nurses, doctors, social workers, teachers, secretaries, managers and officers. There is no profession today where women are not employed. However, it is true that working women have to face problems by virtue of their sex. For centuries women have been subjected to exploitation and torture, physically, sexually and mentally. There are innumerable challenge and problems faced by them both at home and workplace. What we generally see today, in addition to various media and journal reports is that in the workplace women generally face mental stress, sexual harassment, discriminatory practices, safety and security issues etc (Martin, 1989). India's patriarchal society thinks of women only as homemakers and sexual objects and is generally subjected to exploitation and torture (Dube, 2001)

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Women in the workforce earning wages or a salary are part of a modern phenomenon, one that developed at the same time as the growth of paid employment for men; yet women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce (N. Andal 2002). A woman is a social animal. To keep her in captivity, without access to work or finance or interaction with the outside world, is less than fair (Eisenhower, 2002). Economic, social and political empowerment of women is essential for the development of any society. Working women are essential for the development of the society, so empowering working women is important to the process of upliftment of economic, social, political status of women.

FAMILY AND WORK

In "The family, flexible work and social cohesion at risk", Martin Carnoy points out that "globalization and the intensified economic competition it engenders are profoundly altering the way we live and relate to each other." The particular strains imposed on the family by that competition, and the flexibility it demands, are the focus of his analysis. The family which is, along with the workplace, the principal means by which people are socially integrated is called upon to play an even greater sustaining role than in the past because of the increased individualization and differentiation at work. Yet the family itself is undergoing changes, such as slower formation and shorter duration, that tend to undermine its ability to fulfil that role. This raises questions about the various options or models of flexible work on offer. Social cohesion is at risk, perhaps as never before. Carnoy thus puts the family at the center of an integrated view of adjustment to an emerging world order.

One of the critical interactions between the family and work is centered around caregiving. It has a fundamental impact on people's wellbeing and thus transcends the specific value of other forms of productive, reproductive and volunteer work. If its value were to be fully attributed it would surely be costly, and the measured productivity of other activities might well be reduced. Lee Badgett and Nancy Folbre (Chapter 16) examine the relationship between caring labor, social expectations and economic factors in "Assigning care: Gender norms and economic outcomes". Care is given both freely and through the market. One could argue that care services are mediated by the market and that caregiving is formally voluntary. But that would imply accepting the preeminence of those spheres and underplay the gender norms that assign all forms of care largely to women. In the view of Badgett and Folbre, the Marxist tradition and Weberian scholarship would assimilate caregiving to unalienated labor, located in the family

and community and outside the modern market sphere whereas, in a capitalist system, both forms persist, and they fall largely to women.

The social norms which define women's greater responsibility for providing both remunerated and unpaid care, they argue, benign; nor can that responsibility be explained, as neoclassical economics might do, as simple altruism. Nor do biological determinism or culture offer acceptable answers. "Feminist theory emphasizes the coercive dimensions of social norms of masculinity and femininity, describing norms as important elements of gendered structures of constraint." The authors argue that "men as a group have much to gain by encouraging women's caring propensities" in what amounts to socially imposed altruism. In their view it is time to challenge occupational stereotypes, difficult as that process is. The authors argue that resistance results from the cost: "Men are reluctant to assume responsibilities that will lower their market income, just as they are reluctant to enter caring occupations that pay less than most male jobs." Yet norms of masculinity and femininity are being contested, and alternative social contracts are possible and worthy of serious debate.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON WORK AS VALUE

The concept of work and all-important role it has acquired in western societies are historical constructs, not an expression of the essence of humanity. To charge work alone under the ambiguous label of "activity" with the creation and maintenance of the social bond is to submit to the exchange-based version of that bond promoted by economics. It passes over the primary concern of philosophers and citizens, namely the idea of the "good society", the proper goals of society, the nature of social wealth, and the distribution of basic goods (including work) most likely to promote social cohesion. Developing "perspectives on work" calls for an understanding of how work came to play the all-important role it has in society today: what was the underlying historical process? What forces brought this situation about? In other words, what needs to be done is to lay bare the rationale whereby work a historically determined construct if ever there was one has come to be regarded as an inherent feature of the human condition, as the only means of fulfilling all individual and social aspirations. It is high time to put an end to the fruitless debates about whether work is or is not at the centre of modern life and to reveal the historical process whereby work has come to dominate the entirety of individual and social time and space. This is an urgent task for unless it is undertaken there can be no understanding both why work is today the main vehicle for the formation of social relationships and for self-fulfillment, and that this has not always been the case or will be in the future.

Work in contemporary social organization is an outcome, a fact, not a structural feature of all human societies. In other words, it is by accident and not on account of the immutable nature of things that work has become the essential mechanism for the achievement of social integration and self-fulfillment, and the origins of this fact lie not buried in the mists of time but in the response to a certain historically situated state of affairs from which the world may now be emerging, and from which it is certainly desirable to emerge. It is necessary to distinguish the question of the amount of work which will be available in the future from the question of the place that work rightfully occupies in personal and societal life. The interesting question and which should be of major concern to every politician and citizen is what are the necessary conditions for the construction and preservation of the good society, that is, a society forming a wellintegrated whole, providing a mooring and a source of identity for its citizens, able to deal with all manner of strains, both internal (xenophobia, violence, inequality ...) and external, a

society unlikely to dissolve into atoms, i.e. into individuals, at the first threat? It is the question of the good constitution, of good government, which all previous societies have had to ask themselves, which has for centuries lain at the heart of political philosophy and practice, and which, alone, our own civilization has neglected to ask. Work alone in the sense of paid participation by individuals in the productive process cannot weave together and sustain the system of social relationships which is central to a society's cohesion and its insertion in a particular historical period. This is especially evident when one sees how the notion of work prevailing today is a misshapen creature resulting from the numerous meanings conferred on the word over the past two hundred years.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges women are still pushing themselves to reach the top. They are faced with a range of challenges that many of their male counterparts don't have an understanding of it. The issues that are preventing many women from achieving their goal of becoming a leader at their workplace and diminishing their ability to get ahead in their work. One of the biggest challenges that women are currently facing is equality in the workplace. Women leaders everywhere must go for what they want in their careers and not to give up. Hone the skills necessary to give the opportunities, such as communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Women everywhere are making auspicious moves in the workplace. They are taking more risks and preparing themselves to take on more challenging roles in the present scenario.

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