

Bread Winners or Bread Makers? Everyday Challenges Confronted by Women in the Society

*Ms. Rashi Meena**

Abstract

Women are the epitome of strength, love, sacrifice and courage. The role of women in contemporary society has undergone substantial and positive transformations. In modern times, women have achieved a level of self-sufficiency, possessing a heightened awareness and attaining financial independence. They have achieved significant accomplishments across various domains, encompassing athletics, politics, and academics. The promotion of co-education has facilitated the integration of women into various spheres of society, enabling them to participate alongside men in all aspects of life. The advent of the twenty-first century has engendered a renewed sense of optimism and has facilitated the empowerment of women in a constructive manner. In the past, women were often overshadowed by their husbands or fathers, but they have now successfully developed their own distinct identities and achieved a state of autonomy. Education plays a key role in achieving success. The significance of empowering women would be heightened if women possessed comprehensive knowledge and received a quality education. It is imperative for women to possess an extensive awareness of their rights in order to achieve gender equality and be on equal footing with men. Prominent figures such as Indra Nooyi, Chandra Kochhar, Arundhati Bhattacharya, Pratibha Patil, Kalpana Chawla, Droupadi Murmu, Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, among others, have made substantial contributions within their respective domains and serve as inspirational figures for women both in India and worldwide. The role of women has undergone significant transformation, resulting in a notable impact on society. The transition from housewives to CEOs is occurring at an increasingly rapid pace. The expansion of modernization and the emergence of advanced technologies have significantly broadened prospects and possibilities

* Research Scholar, Department of EAFM, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan

for individuals. They have successfully developed their presence and influence in various domains, encompassing social, political, and economic spheres.

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INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing. –

Swami Vivekananda

The portrayal or understanding of a woman in India has been an evolving phenomenon since time immemorial. From once worshipped as divine and pure creatures, to the medieval roles of child bearing and rearing, and now to the contemporary portrayal of power and resistance, the women in India have changed myriad social roles over the past. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of women who have stepped out to become bread earners of the family. While the phenomenon is still emerging in India, there exists a considerable number of households whose men assume the responsibility of managing household affairs, while their female counterparts take up challenging professional roles. The information technology (IT) and business process outsourcing (BPO) sector in India is experiencing a notable shift towards female dominance, as a substantial number of highly skilled and qualified women are making important contributions and achieving remarkable outcomes at the corporate level.

The optimized educational and employment prospects have resulted in changes to her role within the household and in society. It is evident that there is a growing trend of increasing educational attainment among women, resulting in their enhanced economic autonomy and greater representation in official capacities across various hierarchical levels. The conventional perception of Indian women is undeniably undergoing transformation. Dube presents analogous findings. The immediate integration of this transformation into everyday life cannot be anticipated. Traditional attitudes and prejudices continue to endure. It is inevitable for societal opinion to undergo a gradual shift throughout time.

It is indisputable that women in India have experienced significant advancements over the past five decades. However, they continue to face numerous challenges and societal injustices within a predominantly male-dominated context. Today's working woman stands at the crossroads of social

evolution, where the historic meets the futuristic. And as the vanguard of the new generation of revolutionized feminism, she will face difficulties, as pioneers in any discipline must always pay a high price. The role of women in the field of social action has witnessed a significant increase in recent times, marking a notable shift from their historically subjugated position.

Women Employment in India

Since achieving independence in 1947, India has experienced substantial transformations in its economy. The contribution of agriculture to the gross domestic product (GDP) has experienced a significant decline over the years, decreasing from 59 percent in 1950 to a mere one-third at present. This decline has been accompanied by the emergence of a diverse array of modern enterprises and services. Currently, there exist several support services. Despite these developments, agriculture remains the dominant industry. This industry employs a majority of the workforce, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all workers. During the 1990s, India encountered economic challenges. The Persian Gulf Crisis exacerbated the challenges during the latter part of the 1980s and the early years of the 1990s.

Beginning in 1992, India began implementing trade liberalization measures. The economy has improved. During that time, the annual GDP growth rate was between 5% and 7%, and significant progress has been achieved in easing government rules, particularly in the financial sector. Private businesses are subject to regulations.

The historical significance of women's labor and contributions has been widely acknowledged, however their true value has remained largely unacknowledged. Due to the extensive diversity within Indian society, it is not feasible to make overarching generalizations that encompass the numerous geographical, religious, social, and economic segments present in the country. However, the economic engagement of Indian women is influenced by various overarching conditions in which they reside. The Indian society exhibits a pronounced hierarchical structure, wherein individuals are positioned in relation to one another based on factors such as caste (or caste-like group), social class, income, and influence. The phenomenon of evaluating individuals or entities exists in several contexts, including certain business situations, even when it is not overtly acknowledged.

The data on Employment and Unemployment is collected through Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MOSPI). As per the latest PLFS report available for year 2019-20, the estimated Worker

Population Ratio (WPR) on usual status basis for aged 15 years and above both for male and female was 73.0% and 28.7% respectively.

Government has taken various steps to improve women's participation in the labour force and quality of their employment. A number of protective provisions have been incorporated in the labour laws for equal opportunity and congenial work environment for women workers. These includes enhancement in paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, provision for mandatory crèche facility in the establishments having 50 or more employees, permitting women workers in the night shifts with adequate safety measures, etc.

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 now subsumed in the Code on Wages, 2019 provides that there shall be no discrimination in an establishment or any unit thereof among employees on the ground of gender in matters relating to wages by the same employer, in respect of the same work or work of similar nature done by any employee. Further, no employer shall make any discrimination on the ground of sex while recruiting any employee for the same work or work of similar nature in the conditions of employment, except where the employment of women in such work is prohibited or restricted by or under any law for the time being in force.

To enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes.

Despite various steps taken by Government India has amongst the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world. Less than a third of women – 15 years or older – are working or actively looking for a job.

Challenges for Working Women in India

1. Gender Biases

Gender biases refer to the systematic and often unconscious preferences, stereotypes, and prejudices that exist within societies based on an individual's gender. Gender biases manifest at an early developmental stage for women in India. It might be challenging to acknowledge the notion that women possess the ability to work alongside men on an equal footing. Indian society perpetuates a system of male domination in significant and demanding activities, whereas women are often perceived as weak and limited in their ability to handle high workloads in the workplace. The recruitment, compensation, and promotion prospects of Indian women have consistently

been undervalued, hence underestimating their potential and ability. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 fails to ensure equal pay for the majority of employed women, resulting in their underpayment relative to male counterparts. This phenomenon is commonly observed in manufacturing units and businesses that heavily rely on manual labor. In numerous households, when a woman is employed, her entire salary is typically relinquished to her husband, father-in-law, or senior family member, so rendering her independence merely superficial.

Despite women becoming employed, they continue to rely on others for support.

2. Balancing Personnel and Professional Life

The concept of attaining equilibrium between an individual's personal and professional spheres is a subject matter that garners significant attention and holds substantial significance within contemporary society. Maintaining a balance between work and family poses a significant challenge for working women in India. She is tasked with meeting all of the expectations that have been set down by the members of the family, most notably those of the children. Women's ambitions about their careers and the professional world are still looked down upon as unimportant in India. A significant proportion of households exhibit a deficiency in providing emotional and moral assistance to women who are engaged in employment.

Simultaneously, women are confronted with several formal expectations and deadlines that must be met in order to sustain their employment. Working women often experience significant stress in their daily lives as they strive to excel in multiple roles.

3. Mental and Physical Harassment

Mental and physical harassment refers to the act of subjecting someone to unwanted and harmful behavior that affects their mental and physical well-being. The Indian government's failure to properly enforce its sexual harassment law leaves millions of women in the workplace exposed to abuse without remedy. While women in India are increasingly speaking out against sexual abuse at work, but many, particularly in the informal sector, are still constrained by stigma, fear of retribution, and institutional barriers to justice. India has progressive laws to protect women from sexual abuse by bosses, colleagues, and clients, but has failed to take basic steps to enforce these laws. The Central and local governments have failed to promote, establish, and monitor complaints committees – a central feature of the POSH Act – to receive

complaints of sexual harassment, conduct inquiries, and recommend actions against abusers.

4. No Work-Life Balance

The harmonious equilibrium between one's professional and personal life is referred to as Work-Life Balance. In the context of India, female professionals are required to effectively manage the demands of both their familial responsibilities and professional pursuits in order to attain autonomy and accomplishment in their personal and occupational spheres. However, it is very apparent a significant disparity persists in the division of household and childcare responsibilities between men and women. That is why many women cannot abandon house chores and children's activities for work.

This does not imply that women are inherently less efficient in any way. In contrast, their work exhibits a higher degree of attention and productivity. However, the interpretation of the concept does not align with that perspective. The lack of dedication and loyalty is perceived as a significant factor.

Consequently, mothers are confronted with the dilemma of selecting between professional advancement, devoting sufficient time to nurturing their children, or succumbing to exhaustion. Furthermore, it is notable that a significant number of employers exhibit a lack of comprehension, regard, or concern for the various issues related to maternity that women encounter. Consequently, these employers may engage in discriminatory practices against women which again results in gender biasness.

Conclusion

It is widely believed that women globally have experienced discrimination and other forms of deprivation throughout history, including being denied fundamental rights such as access to education and property ownership. The issue at hand has experienced a gradual increase in significance over the course of recent decades, prompting initiatives to integrate women into various aspects of society. These efforts mostly focus on socio-economic endeavors, with the goal of empowering women and ultimately achieving gender equality. The progression towards the emancipation of women has achieved significant milestones, signifying the substantial societal advancements that have been made. Over the course of the past few decades, they have encountered significant challenges, yet have managed to effectively develop their distinct character. Contemporary women have qualities of patience and tenacity, enabling them to achieve remarkable levels of accomplishment. In the past, women were predominantly perceived as bread-

makers whose responsibilities were primarily centered around cooking, cleaning, and tending to their families. In addition to effectively managing challenging clients in the workplace, individuals also demonstrate the ability to multitask efficiently within their domestic responsibilities. Women possess a heightened level of concentration and possess a distinct ability to make decisions, even when occupying high-ranking positions within an organization. This ability is often demonstrated in an optimal manner and, in certain instances, surpasses that of their male counterparts. The empowerment of women has the potential to contribute to accelerated societal growth and development. We are actively engaged in the process of transforming the world.

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