

A REFLECTION OF WOMEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN WORKING SECTOR

DEBJANI ROY

Research Scholar, CJMC - Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

Women are the new paradigms of today's culture beginning from home to working sector. Women work in three criteria. Women are taking active participation in management, local governance and political fields. Women trend in working sector has changed with globalization. Women are involved in SNA activities. A survey has also been conducted about the nature of women work behaviour. A significant part of women are unpaid because they are socially unrecognised. Women work is rendered invisible because of social perceptions. Women are the resource of our country in every field. Women have shifted traditional assumptions about their roles and capabilities. Women have basic rights about decision making. There are facts and figures about women participating in different roles. In this era women have made comprehensive steps in educational attainment and workforce participation. Women participation in work is one of the proxy indicators of women in overall status in society and gender empowerment. Women are managing complex interfaces between domestic and work culture. This is the very power of women in this 21st century.

KEYWORDS: SNA Activities, NSSO Survey, Mercer Survey, Gender Segregation

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is not a new word in today's gender literature. Women are becoming more and more self dependent by accessing to all opportunities which women were denied in the past. Women have possessed the power to utilise power in every field. The role of women is rooted into eternity. A woman goes under many transitions. It takes time for women to unfold her into self established person. There are two types of struggling women in the community. One who has highly established and the other in a struggling society to confine herself into proper designation. Gone are the days when men overruled women in each sphere and gone are the days when women were denied of freedom and opportunities. Now women are setting up enterprises and taking up income generated activities maintaining family.

The role of Indian women has ranged from that of a deity from pure to vulgar from being supreme to downtrodden and also innumerable manifestations of virtue or vice. Indian women have undergone drastic change. Now this change is due to increase in globalization, impact of technology, impact of media and other cultures, impact of social, economic and political cross currents of the world, and unforeseen and unanticipated events across the world. The social cultural context of women growing up remained the same for thousands of years, political ideology and governance of a nation emerged from the 1940s in India, industrialization took roots and mass education for both women and men. Women has to play multiple roles sometimes role of wife or mother or role of parents or daughter and simultaneously in the social setting to play different roles in community and doing this she has to submerge her own self role and real identity. This is the century of telecom, IT and financial institutions. Women expertise in all the industries is beginning to emerge and women are emerging as a force to reckon it. The transition will be where women will create new paradigms. (Parikh, 2005)

Conceptual Framework of Women Empowerment

One has to view that empowerment is taking place on different levels and change is very necessary at all levels. We can relate it on basis of three criteria – on individual, group and societal/ community level and interaction between them. Individual means the perception of oneself to control herself and identify goal and work till it is reached. Group deals with collective action and sense of agency that woman experience in a group. Society level deals with political and social climate its norms and public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women. The three levels are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. From micro-level there is need for reframing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts which may flow from the globalization process.

Facts and Figures of Women Employees

A new Mercer survey on women's leadership development shows about 15% of the respondents were from Indian organizations, companies must adopt a philosophy encouraging talented women to lead from front.

73% companies don't have a strategy for developing women in leadership roles.

42% companies do not offer activities targeted to the needs of women leaders.

23% companies offer some activities or programs for women.

9% companies are planning to add programmes and activities in the future.

20% companies are very concerned about retaining women in leadership roles.

20% companies want to have work – life programmes to attract and retain female talent.

81% companies want to help women develop the full range of skills for senior leadership roles.

Many respondents believe that women have the right stuff to be leaders. The public rates women superior to men according to the survey conducted. 6% of respondents in this survey of 2,250 adults say that women make better leaders than men. 69% says men and women make equally good leaders. In this era women have made comprehensive steps in educational attainment and workforce participation. Only few have made to the higher level of political or corporate leadership. Respondents also said those women's family responsibilities and their shortage of experience holds them back from upper level. What respondents did not state is that women lack what it takes to be leaders. Respondents rate women better than or equal to men.

Half of the respondents said that women are more honest than men and honesty according to respondents is the most important to leadership of any of the traits measured in the survey. The next important leadership trait in public view is intelligence where 38% said women are smarter than men while 14% said men are smarter. (DR Nirzar Kulkarni, 2011)

Women in Management

In the words of Kristof and WuDunn (2009): *The world is awakening to a powerful truth: women and girls aren't the problem, they're the solution.*

Women have increased their participation rates in managerial and professional jobs but they are paid less even working on the same position compared to men in the levels of management. This is often called gender segregation. However, it should be noted that there is crisis of statistics and research on certain minority groups with female management population in 20 countries. There were an increasing proportion of women entrepreneurs and small business owners in almost all countries but the growth is slow like in Argentina and in most countries these proportions were low like in Israel and Turkey. (Burke)

Women are the most underutilized natural resource in the world.

CARE, USA

Local Governance

In India, UN Women has helped more than 65,000 elected women representatives in village councils in five states acquire skills and confidence to advocate their priorities. Where women once felt intimidated as the men talked they now speak up. They ask for new services such as systems to ease the burdens of water collection and improve sanitation and mobilize efforts to prevent child marriage and stop alcohol abuse. (UN Women, 2012-2013)

Women's Participation in India

There has not been much research on female labour force participation in India but its participation is low compared to other countries. In 1998 India's Central Statistical Organization conducted a time use survey in six states for which household duties were classified as "extended-SNA" activities. The survey showed that urban women spent about nine hours per week on SNA activities. Analyzing women's participation decision at the individual level based on a sample of urban women aged 20 to 59 excluding women who are enrolled in education or unable to work due to disability and women who are head of their household. Self-employed women are dropped from the sample due to the non-availability of self-employment earnings data. It is assumed that women's participation decision is made conditional on men's so we do not consider joint utility maximization or bargaining within household. (Pieters, 2012)

Implications

There were some tangible signs of progress though uneven and indications of stalling and back-sliding. More women are now in the workforce. More women are getting the necessary education and experience to equip them for success in the workforce. The work and life experiences of women in several countries in the developing world indicated many distressing features. Women worldwide still lack basic rights such as education, freedom from violence, opportunities to pursue what many of us see as taken for granted options and justice in the workplace and in their societies.

Recent Trends in Patterns of Women's Work

It is true that compared to many other countries there has been relative stability of aggregate female work participation rates in India which have remained quite low over time. But there are wide variations and differing trends across states and rural and urban areas as well as changes in the pattern of work. Meanwhile in rural India self-employment

has come to dominate women's activities even in non-agricultural occupations largely because of difficulty of finding paid work. Women workers dominate in both paid and unpaid domestic work. This activity has also become increasingly important as an employer especially for urban women. Not only is this activity becoming feminised but it is becoming more important in the total employment of women especially in urban India. The NSSO Survey of 2004-05 showed a dramatic increase in the number of women engaged in domestic service.

Further, total increase in the number of women workers in the entire decade a whopping 14.4% was accounted by domestic work. This suggests that more remunerative and desirable work is simply not available even for women who wish to enter the labour force and they are forced to seek this employment as the only alternative. This further operates to reduce the reservation for women workers and reduce the potential for increased wages and better working conditions.

Estimating Women's Work

The point that work participation rates as described by official surveys are not really good indicators of the productive contributions of women is particularly valid in large parts of India, where much of the economic activity of women, whether in the home or outside is simply not recognised as such by other household members and even by the women themselves. A significant part of women's work is not just unpaid therefore, it is also socially unrecognised. This is true of not just social reproduction but other economic activity where women's work is rendered invisible by social perceptions. That is why many social scientists take women's work participation rate as one of the proxy indicators of women's overall status in society and of gender empowerment. It is not just because paid work provides income individually to women rather than to male members of the household. It is also because the productive contribution of women is typically less recognised in societies where women are undervalued in general.

In this regard, the difficulties inherent in the statistical system of identifying, enumerating and quantifying the work performed by women are to be noted. Since many of the activities associated with household maintenance, provisioning and reproduction which are typically performed by women or female children are not subject to explicit market relations, there is an inherent tendency to ignore the actual productive contribution of these activities. Similarly, social norms, values and perceptions also operate to render most household-based activity "invisible". This invisibility gets directly transferred to data inadequacies making officially generated data in most countries very rough and imprecise indicators of the actual productive contribution of women. This entire means that women participation is inaccurate. Not only are the problems of undercounting and invisibility rife but there are often substantial variations in data across countries which may not reflect actual differences but simply distinct methods of estimation.

Obviously, the nature of women participation in economic activities which involves a substantial amount of unpaid labour, participation in the labour market or in what is declared to be economic activity does not capture the full extent of women's work. The major Indian sources of data in this matter, the Census of India and the National Sample Surveys have increased their attempt to recognise women's work by asking probing questions that seek to establish women's involvement in economic activity. However, this is still defined to include only participation in work for the household farm or enterprise and does not include housework, childcare, care of the sick and old and related activities associated with social reproduction. It also does not include related work necessary for provisioning for the household whether it is fuel wood collection in the rural areas or attempts to obtain access to clean water in the urban areas, activities that are typically the responsibility of the women of the household.

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Woman has to perform multiple roles be it familial or social irrespective of her career as working woman or an entrepreneur. In our society more importance is being given to male child than to female child. However the women of today will touch the magic of enlightening themselves. It is this new beginning women will create a legacy and a heritage and pass it on to generation after generation. Women are experienced in managing one of the complex organizations imaginable the household with its many human interfaces.

Women have learnt overtime negotiation and reconciliation and qualities of patience and understanding along with an inherent quality of emotional intelligence. All these transferable skills can be brought to bear upon the workplace making it richer from these experiences.

Women are working in this multifaceted where organization scenario changes like a kaleidoscope with every responsibility, accountability and multiple pulls and pushes which women have faced and came out with success. In the new order, women will put down roots of a family and discover the freedom of sailing in the open seas. The women will visualize a new horizon and identify directions and make tough decisions. Women will cross the threshold to listen to their own voices. The silence of centuries will find the first voice which will beckon women to sail into the unknown and uncharted land to lay the foundations of their growth to contribute to a partnership. (Parikh, 2005)

Women in the 21st – Still an Illusion of Reality

Notwithstanding the remarkable changes in the position of women in free India there is still a great divergence between the constitutional position and reality of deprivation and degradation. The human rights scenario in the country continues to be dismal and depressing. Women are being brutalized, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination. Although gender discrimination has been banned by the constitution of India but are these rights enjoyed in reality by women. Even half a century after independence women have mostly remained outside the domain of power and political authority. No doubt the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts have provided access at the grass-root level but their representation in the parliament and state legislatures is poor. Insecurity is a major factor which does not allow women leaders to identify leadership at grass-root level. In reality women representatives are ornamental in nature and political consciousness is found lacking among them. However, mere reservation will not solve the problem unless and until women are given powers to function effectively and they themselves become more conscious and aware of their rights and duties.

The popular UNESCO slogan: “educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a family.” (Bhuyan, 2006)

CONCLUSIONS

Women have shifted traditional assumptions about their roles and capabilities. There has been a marked change and it has been for the better. Many of its benefits have yet to touch the majority and all of us continue to experience various forms of gender discrimination. If laws designed to address the concerns of women are to have a dramatic and positive impact on women’s lives, they must be sensitive to the social, economic, and political disempowerment of women throughout the world. The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable woman to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns.

This is also an important time for successful women to come forward and make a contribution for providing cross industry mentoring for successor generations of women that will guide them through their challenges at the workplace. Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another. The role of Indian women has undergone dramatic and drastic changes from era to era, while within the eras themselves there have existed simultaneous contradictions. This in itself has created problems for contemporary women in experiencing a continuity of their identity within the society. What a woman growing up in Indian society interjects is perhaps a collage and a flux of attitudes, perceptions, roles and locations of their identity. It seems to be difficult to take a logical look at all this. A new form and a new structure emerged. This took thousands of years and tears of millions of women who with courage moved the mountain of debris of beliefs and freed themselves from the chains and shackles of centuries.

In the next millennium Indian women would have to cross a major threshold and enter an unknown land. They will have to walk a path where none existed with a sense to discover. They will have to encounter and live with excitement and enthusiasm as well as threat, fears, anxieties and terror. It is the trust in the self of the resource to be generated of the courage to journey forth in a new land, to live through the terrains of uncharted land that the women of today will shape the new identity. They will discover the voice which has been silenced for centuries to sing the songs of life and living and to discover the joys of experiencing the beauty around. However, the women of today will touch the magic of enlivening themselves. The past, present and future will emerge to create that space where movement and stability where noise and silence, light and darkness and chaos and tranquillity lose their absolutism to create a new rhythm and unfolding.

REFERENCES

1. Bhuyan, D. D. (2006, January). Empowerment of Indian Women: A Challenge of 21st Century. Orissa, India.
2. Burke, M. J. (n.d.). Women in Management Worldwide: Progress and Prospects- An Overview.
3. DR Nirzar Kulkarni, D. R. (2011). Women Leadership in Indian Corporate. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research.
4. Ghosh, J. (2009). Never Done and Poorly Paid: Women's work in Globalising India. New Delhi.
5. Parikh, B. K. (2005, August). Reflection of Indian Women in Entrepreneurial World, Ahmadabad, India.
6. Pieters, S. K. (2012, February). Push or Pull? Drivers of Female labour Force Participation during India's Economic Boom. Bonn, Germany.
7. (2012-2013). UN Women.